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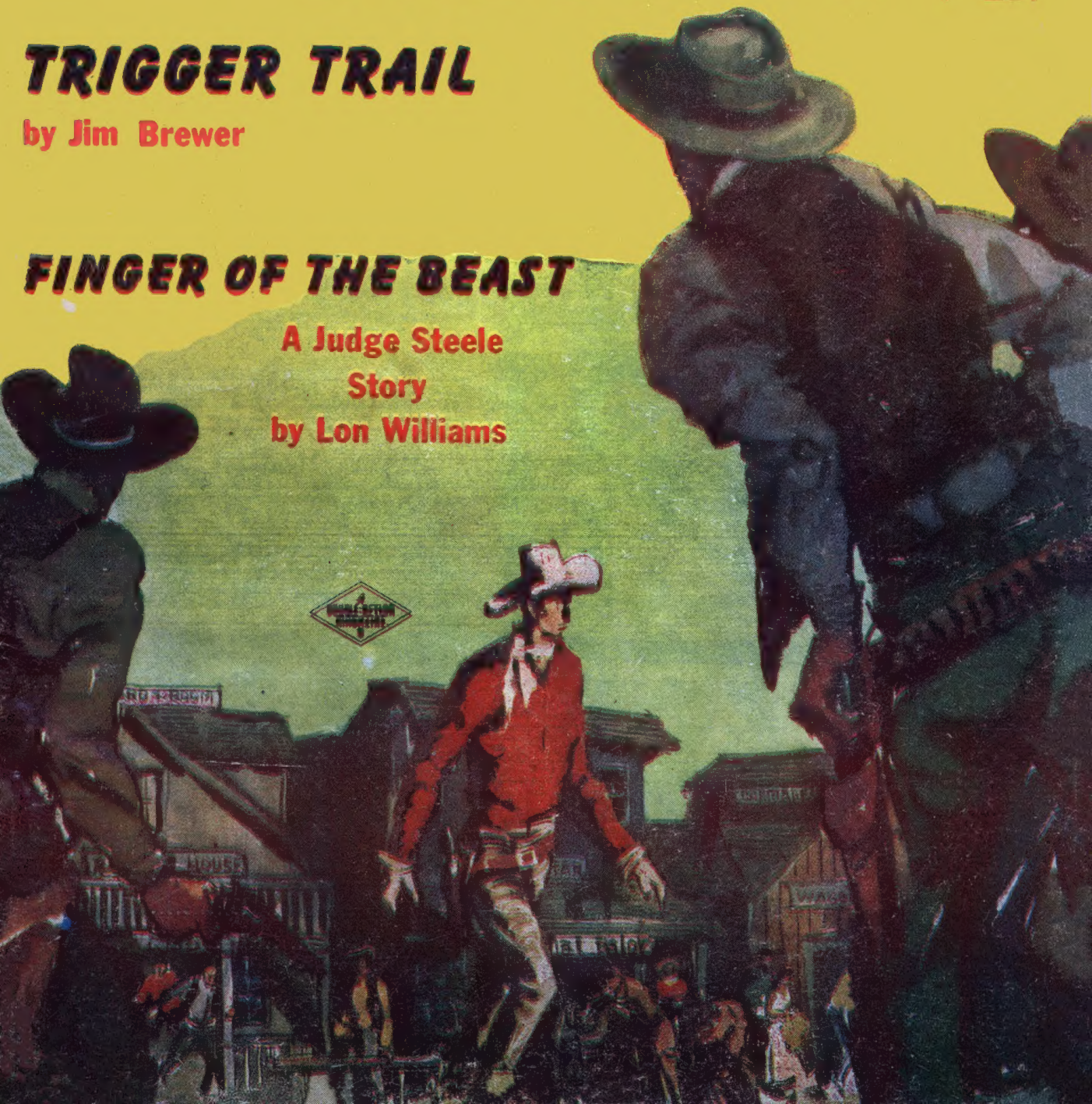

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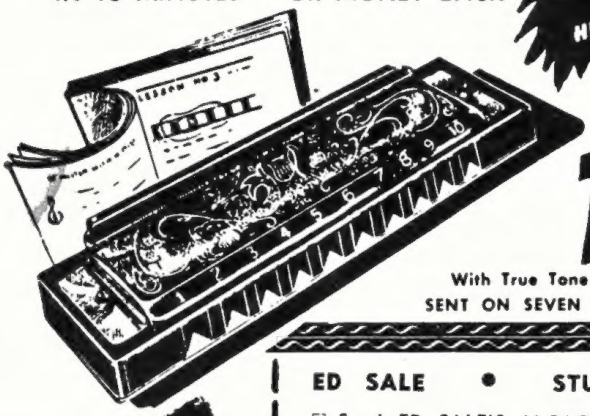

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WESTERN ACTION

Volume 18 April, 1955 Number 6

Our Featured Novelet

NO PLACE FOR ANY MAN

by H. W. Kiemle 6

Arrowhead Springs had been peaceful too long, and Jim Wells had been living in safety and comfort too long. And now, hunting a band of road agents, he suddenly found himself hunted...

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ROBERT W. LOWNDES, *Editor*
MARIE ANTOINETTE PARK, *Asso. Ed.*

MILTON LUROS, *Art Director*
CLIFF CAMPBELL, *Asso. Ed.*

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Old Jim was unarmed and surrounded...

Arrowhead Springs was expanding now, and with expansion came a new wave of lawlessness. Once again a man's bankroll was no longer safe in town or country, and a sheriff's posse combed the hills and wilds wearily, seeking traces of vanishing thieves.

NO PLACE FOR ANY MAN

★ FEATURED RANGELAND NOVELET

by H. W. Kiemle

CLOUD shadows drifted slowly over the hills across the valley, sharpening their rugged silhouette against the sun-drenched, distant background. Slowly they moved down the side of the hill to envelop the group of buildings nestled among the trees near the blue and silver stream that meandered through the valley.

Not a bad spread, thought Jim Wells, from his high vantage point overlooking the scene. He hoped that Vince Gatlin would be in a good mood for what he was going to suggest. But then why shouldn't Vince be? Gatlin seemed like the right sort and pretty friendly since he arrived and took over the Running Y. Wells rolled the cigaret between his lips and a snatch of smoke drifted back in the breeze. He hummed a tune as he started up his horse and turned to descend into the valley.

Many years before, another rider had halted his horse on the same spot, half naked and bedecked with feathers and bright hued breech-clout. His painted face had twisted in a horrible grimace as he shook his feathered lance in defiance. He too had wheeled his horse and descended the steep incline but his purpose had been to kill and burn. Time had changed all this.

The warrior no longer sulked in the hills and the white bandits and cattle rustlers that had followed in his wake had been driven off. A horse-thief had been hanged some years ago and some rough characters still haunted the saloons in town; but the gun that hung at Wells' hip was more of a decoration than a necessity. Peace had come to the country, along with a certain amount of prosperity.

Jim Wells rode in among the buildings and slid off his horse near the corral. He nodded at a couple of cowhands lazily working about the place while they grinned and waved a friendly, "Hello."

"Boss around?" he inquired.

The man nearest slid his hat back and scratched his receeding hairline with the ease that denoted a habit of years. "Waal, most like he's back in his office in the main house countin' the profits," he drawled. "Been keepin' us jumpin' lately." He eased his weight back against the corral fence and fumbled for tobacco.

Jim looped the reins around a rail and left his mount standing in the shade of a cottonwood while he sauntered off toward the ranch house. He climbed the few steps up on to the veranda and strode across the creaking boards to the comparative gloom of an open door.

"Gatlin, you at home?" Jim rapped on the door as he spoke.

Footsteps could be heard inside and a tall man approached. "Oh, Wells! Come right in. Been doing some routine paperwork and it pretty much bores me; I'd rather be moving about. Glad to have a sociable time for a spell." He smiled in a friendly manner and extended his hand. "Come back here."

They moved toward the back room, which Gatlin used as an office. Here they settled in easy chairs and the host, turning his head, called, "Hey, Maria! Some water and glasses!"

"Haven't seen you for quite some time. Been busy?" he began, turning to Wells.

"Some," replied Jim. "We've been cuttin' out some stock with the idea of drivin' it into Arrowhead Springs next week. Got a buyer there willin' to pay fancy prices for some good breedin' animals. That's what brings me here today."

AT THIS moment a fat Mexican woman paddled her way into the room bearing a tray containing a pitcher of water and some glasses.

"Set them on the desk," he ordered, "and that'll be all for now." He rose and slid open a desk drawer. "Always like to keep the best on hand," he smiled as he lifted out a bottle of old Bourbon.

They settled back in their chairs, glasses in hand.

"So you're selling some of your breeding stock," continued Gatlin.

"Yep, we've cut out about one hundred head. We can spare 'em for the price we're gettin'." Wells replied. "May as well get down to business while we're on the subject," he went on. "Usually, when we sell steers for beef they are driven to the railroad chutes at Randall. It's not too much of a drive and not a rough trail. Now, however, we've got to get them to Arrowhead Springs and there's two ways of doing it: around Indian Hat Mountain or across your land. If we go around Indian Hat it will mean an extra fifty miles of drivin' and part of that will be over a very rough trail when we cross the ridge. If we drive over to Runnin' Y, it'll be a simple matter and our stock will arrive at its destination in good shape.

"I'd like to make some sort of arrangement with you for the privilege—" Jim paused.

Gatlin sat, lounged back, his gaze resting on the drink in his hand. Then his face lit up and he turned to Jim.

"Sure thing. I see no reason why we can't get together on a little matter like that," he smiled. "Wouldn't be much of a neighbor if I refused. Here have another," and he reached for the Bourbon.

An hour had passed when the two men, in a mellow mood, emerged from the doorway of the ranch house. They clattered down the wooden steps and wandered affably in the direction of Wells' horse, where they shook hands and Jim mounted. He whirled his horse and departed with Gatlin's parting remark, "I'll send some of my boys over to help you get started across my land."

Wells waved his hand and disappeared around the corner of a low building. Humming a little tune he rolled a smoke. Things had gone well. Not that he had expected any opposition, for Vince Gatlin had always been neighborly and easy-going since the day he took over the Running Y, one year ago; but the way his request had been received had eased a number of problems in his mind regarding other matters which would be bound to come up with a neighboring ranch. Cordial relations would be to the advantage of both.

A FEW DAYS later 'midst a chorus of "Yip, Yips" and "yeoughs," and the pounding of hundreds of hooves, the drive started. Jim Wells rode point and before long the herd was strung out and movin, steadily. Soon several riders made their appearance over the top of a hill. They swooped down and joined Wells.

"Compliments of the Runnin' Y," grinned their spokesman, the man Jim had met working about Gatlin's corral.

Wells waved a pleasant greeting. "We're pretty well manned and everything seems under control. Might ride ahead though, and clear away any of your own stock so we don't pick them up," he suggested. After some exchange of small talk, Gatlin's riders spread out and forged ahead and the drive continued uneventfully.

Ten days later the little cavalcade made up of horsemen and chuck wagon, wended its way across the plain outside of Arrowhead Springs. Jim Wells, had a substantial wad of bills in his moneybelt, and the men had their spirits calmed a bit after a free day and night on the loose in town. The cattle had been delivered and the deal consumated so after a day's holiday, they were returning for there was much to be done at the ranch. Camp was made late that evening after they covered a considerable distance. Speedier travel was in order, since there was no longer the hindrance of the slowly moving herd.

The stars were popping out in the sky, that evening, and the western horizon still glowed with the last orange tinge of the sun's fading rays. Wells leaned against the chuck wagon, smoking. "I'll be cuttin' off from the rest of you come noon tomorrow, Pete," he told his foreman. "Got business in town to take care of while I'm carrying this roll. You know what's to be done at the ranch so you'll take the boys and get to it."

"Don't you think, mebby, you should take somebody along with you, well, as sort of a bodyguard?" suggested young Fred Halsome, much concerned. "Be glad to do the job myself."

Jim turned his gaze in Fred's direction and smiled, "So would any of the other boys, I'm sure," he answered. "Don't worry, son; I'll personally tell that little blonde, light-o-love of yours that you were askin' for her when I drop into the hardware store where she works. Besides you'll be gettin' a few days off before long."

Pete chuckled, "Might as well take him with you, Boss. He ain't been much good at workin' lately; jes' sets around gazin' off like as though he was lookin' for stars in the daytime."

"Then he wouldn't be much good as

a bodyguard, either," laughed Wells. "Better put him to work with a shovel, somewhere. Might wake him up if you let him dig another well back by the corral."

"To think of the thanks I get when I offer my services for some worthwhile project!" Young Fred shook his head sadly and moved off into the gloom.

THE CAMP settled down as darkness crept over the scene and the stars glittered brilliantly overhead. A coyote yapped from the top of a nearby hill and finally the two figures left remaining at the coals of the fire turned in to their blankets. Somebody snored.

At dawn Cookie banged on a frying pan, rousing the lot of sleeping figures. They rolled out slowly and had breakfast, grumbling for the most part about the rough life of a cowpoke. When the sun reached a point high in the sky, Jim Wells bade his companions "So long" and took himself off to one side of the trail, over a low ridge and down into another valley. The country was wilder here but it would cut one day's journey off on the trip to the town of Randall.

The valley narrowed and the sides steepened. Now the land was fairly well wooded with large boulders strewn here and there along the way. Jim jumped a couple of black-tail deer as he topped a little rise and later came on the huge tracks of a bear as it paddled its way through the trickling waters of a tiny stream. No human life was evident anywhere, not even the hoofprints of some passing rider's mount. Behind him somewhere a jay screamed, then another. Jim glanced back over his shoulder. "Must be they sighted that bear," he thought.

When the sun began to redden in the west he was still traveling through the wooded area. Darkness would make moving along a difficult or even a hazardous venture and since there was no particular urgency involved in his getting to Randall, he camped in a grassy glade near the stream.

With his horse staked out where it could forage, nearby, he built a small fire next to a rock. A squirrel back in the woods chattered his last for that day and the night sounds of the wild took over as darkness fell. An owl hooted while something rustled around on the floor of the woods. A twig snapped back in the darkness.

"Must try this place sometime for a hunt," Jim mused as he gazed up at the rocky hilltop silhouetted against the stars, across the stream. He rolled his blankets around himself in the night-time chill and was soon asleep.

Time passed as Jim slept. Something moved silently through the brush, a blob of shadow among other shadows. It paused then moved again, coming closer and closer. The night breeze swished the leaves in the treetops and the shadow advanced through the grass to the far side of the rock where Jim slept. The shadow straightened—a man with a drawn gun in his hand. He waited, one hand on the rock then, carefully placing his foot to avoid all sound and pausing between each step, he circled the rock to where Jim lay.

Once more the man crouched. He raised his gun high then brought it down fast. There was a thud and Jim shuddered. The man waited, poked the inert figure with the gun muzzle before discarding all caution.

- 2 -

THE SUN shone brightly on the treetops, filtering down to the floor of the woods when Jim stirred. He was chilled and his head throbbed horribly. He tried to sit up but the effort cost him great pain. His hand found its way to his forehead and

he rubbed his eyes. They seemed a bit out of focus.

What had happened? He shook his head, trying to remember but all he could recall was peacefully resting in his blankets under the stars and tree branches. Then his fingers found an extremely tender spot high on his forehead. He touched it gingerly, feeling dried, matted hair. It must be blood. He winced but this time succeeded in rising to a sitting positon where he remained, face in his hands for a few moments.

Can't figure this, he thought. *It's just as though somebody hit me a good one, but I can't remember—*

He felt for his money-belt. It was gone! Fingering his gunbelt he found that the holster was empty. He opened his eyes, and the light hurt; but with much blinking he was able to make out his horse busily munching the dewy grass, its shiny rump reflecting the sunlight across the glade. Jim painfully managed to get to his feet and with the aid of several saplings along the way, stumbled to the edge of the stream. Cool water helped ease the pain and the dizzyness departed.

Saddling was difficult but as he rode along the trail, his head cleared. Now he was angry. The thought of losing that money at this time nearly made him forget the throb in his head. He would not have sold some of his finest breeding stock had he not needed the cash for certain pressing obligations. "Jim Wells, you clumsy jackass," he muttered, "might have guessed this would happen. Everybody and his uncle knew you carried that cash on you!" He muttered some more, and cussed, but that solved no problems.

Suddenly Wells noticed that he was not the first to travel along that trail, as had been the case the day before. Fresh hoofprints strung on ahead. He urged his horse on at a faster pace. If only he had a gun! Following the other rider's trail for a few miles he came to the edge of the wooded area and moved into higher and more open country. Here the ground was dryer, and the trail harder to follow; several times he had to circle around before he could locate hoofmarks; then they petered out altogether among the rocks. He rode to the top of a rise and stopped to look around. The hot sun pounded down upon him and his head felt worse. He'd not be much good in a fight now, even if he did catch up with his assailant; but that was next to impossible.

From the top of the hill he searched the landscape. Far to the northeast, he could make out a faint puff of dust and he quickly started his horse to follow. The sudden movement nearly dislodged him from the saddle and a wave of nausea swept over him. His head throbbed cruelly; the strain of his experience had been too much. Reeling slightly he regretfully turned toward the home ranch.

HIS MEN spied his approach as Jim neared the corral and knew at once that something was amiss. Wells was not due home till the following day, at least. Two men, all prepared to leave for the range waited in their saddles as he rode up. Pete, the foreman approached. "What's up, boss? Anything wrong?"

Jim rode grasping the pommel of his saddle with both hands. He lifted his head a bit and smiled wanly, "Somebody popped me over the head while I slept and vamosed with my roll. 'Bout done in—for now!"

Pete ran up and grasped Wells as he slid from the saddle.

"You really should have let me come along with you," said Fred Halsome, fingering the handle of his gun.

Wells and his foreman walked slowly to the ranch-house, Pete listening to what his boss had to say about what had happened. Jim removed his boots and with a sigh, stretched out on his

bed, his head pounding. He closed his eyes and the feeling of dizziness soon left him. "I'll be all right after a little rest," he told his foreman.

Pete saw there was little for him to do indoors, so with a reassuring, "I'll take care of everything," he hurried back to the corral. Rounding up all the available hands, they saddled and were soon pounding hoofs across the country to where Wells had seen that distant puff of dust. They spread out, searching the hills without success. Once a trail had been found and followed for a few miles then lost for good on a much traveled road. Disconsolately, they wandered back to the home ranch in pairs, late that night.

Jim Wells took things easy for a few days. The loss of the money was no small item to him but there seemed little to do about the matter except lie low and keep one's eyes and ears open. Sheriff Ben Cogswell dropped by one day to discuss the robbery.

"There's a bunch hanging around town I don't like. The place's growing, what with more cattle being shipped and more amusement joints opening up. So far though, things have been orderly enough, so there's nothing I can do about them. It's just that now and then someone gets relieved of his roll—and it might be any one of several hundred people with no evidence pointing to any particular one."

The sheriff went on, "Folks'll just have to be more careful and not dangle temptation in front of these enterprisin' varmints." He shook a finger at Wells, "You might've had one of your men along, jest to keep you company," he remonstrated.

Jim liked the old sheriff and he felt that any loss had been his own fault and not the law's. He shrugged his shoulders, "Be different next time, if there's going to be a next time," and he smiled a little. "I'd thought those wild days were over and done with," he added.

Later that week Jim rode into Randall. The place did have a busier look. There were more men walking about on the dusty street and the hitching racks in front of the saloons were lined with waiting horses. He thought there must be some outfit in town that had just finished a drive, for many horses bore the same brand; but there were many other brands, too. He finished his business with his old friend Tom Meany, the attorney-at-law then dropped into the bank to put certain affairs in order. On completing these chores he stepped out into the sunny glare of the street. Someone waved and came across the street. It was Vince Gatlin.

"Heard of your bad luck," he sympathized, "sorry to hear about it." They shook hands and Gatlin continued, "Things are getting rougher 'round here every day. They keep on and we'll be back in the old days of the vigilantes again. Somebody's got to do something." They strolled across the boardwalk into a saloon. "Why just last night a fellow was stuck up right on the edge of town. Didn't lose much but I don't like it."

THEY HAD a drink and Vince's indignation mounted. "If I find any strangers back on my range I'll run 'em off so fast they'll think they're flying, and you better do the same." His vehement voice, raised in anger, attracted the attention of several onlookers who stared at him blankly.

One large man lounging back in a chair, gave an unpleasant little laugh and rose suddenly, his hand accidently sweeping a drink off the table into the lap of a young, celebrating cowpuncher. The puncher's retaliation was swift. He leaped up and with a quick blow pushed the big man back, stumbling over, smashing the chair then stood over him with gun drawn.

"Let's get out of here," whispered Wells, "I don't cotton to this touchy atmosphere." They left quietly.

"That big fellow is Rod Linton. He seems to have some influence hereabouts, and also seems to be living on a nice, comfortable but hidden income. Wonder where he gets it? He don't work!" Vince went on, "And if that young puncher don't hi-tail it for his own spread before dark, he'll more'n likely be found in some alley, cold, come morning!"

"Take it easy," and Gatlin waved his hand on swinging into the saddle. Jim stood watching him ride off into the twilight. The boxy bulk of the town's buildings silhouetted against the salmon colored sky as Vince disappeared around a corner. Jim's thoughts were on his friend's words, "Getting tough around here—vigilantes!" He shrugged his shoulders and mounting rode toward the livery stable.

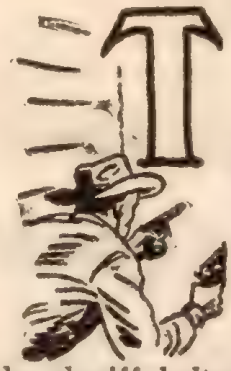
Later, on emerging from the little restaurant near the hotel, Wells heard the babble of voices. It arose from a small group of men clustered around the sheriff's office so he strode over in that direction.

A small man was excitedly repeating, "I saw one of them. Saw him good! Could identify him anywhere, I tell you! Big man—had a good look at his face." The little man quieted as the door to the office opened and the sheriff paused on the step. By this time other men had come straggling down the street. It was night but a bright moon bathed the dusty town with a soft light.

"Ready men," spoke the sheriff, and the murmuring ceased. "Mount up. There'll be light enough for some hours yet to comb those hills round where Tom here was stuck up. The more of you there are, the more chance we'll have of pickin' something up."

So that was it—another holdup! Jim ran over to the stable and saddled quickly. A group of men were already galloping out of town. He joined the stragglers and soon caught up with the main group. A wildly-riding figure passed him and he recognized the young quick-tempered cowboy of the barroom fracas. *Good we don't have many such highly-oiled, hotheads along tonight,* he thought; *we'd have a lynching on our hands if any unfortunate traveler got picked up!*

- 3 -



THE POSSE thundered on followed by a trail of dust, silvery in the moonlight. The small man, Tom, rode in the lead with Sheriff Cogswell, directing the way to the scene of the holdup. When they neared the spot, the sheriff halted his men and went ahead on foot with his best tracker, to see if a trail could be found. They moved along slowly to the northwest for about a half-mile, the posse following some hundred yards behind; then, on a signal from the sheriff, rode up.

"They seem to be moving this way. Spread out and keep movin'!"

A long line of men, riding abreast but spaced considerably, rode across the rough country, making as much speed as they could under the circumstances. Scouring the gullies and peering ahead from the tops of the ridges and hillocks, they moved along steadily in a northwesternly direction till their way was blocked by steep banks and cliffs through which there were but two passes. Here they split up, the sheriff taking his group through one and Deputy Bart Rodney the other pass. The going was bad here, for the moon was low and inky shadows covered the trails, making travel almost impossible; they let their mounts slowly pick their own paths through the darkness. Sometime in the small hours of the morning, Deputy Rodney called a halt to his group. Jim Wells

was glad to dismount and join the others in a few winks of sleep which lasted till dawn. As soon as it was light enough they were on their way.

An hour later the trail through the cut opened up into more open country. The deputy was in the lead when he suddenly twisted his horse about and started to decend the small rise of ground he had climbed. He signaled for a halt and silence. Ahead, from a clump of boulders, he had spotted a vague wisp of smoke drifting up in the dim morning light.

The sun was beginning to paint the tops of the hills to the west when four men slipped over the crest of the little rise, afoot, armed with rifles as well as the revolvers that clung to their hips. They spread and circled the boulders keeping under cover while the rest of the group waited in the shelter of the little hill, mounted and ready to charge. Quietly the unmounted men closed in.

The fire was burning low and before it stood a tall man, quietly sipping a tin cup of hot coffee. He glanced down at another man squatted opposite. "I'm all for continuing on south; we'll do better down that way," he was saying.

"An' I've had my fill of bumming around," the squatting man answered. "This country looks like as good a place as any to settle down in, fer a while anyway. Why do you always have to get sand in your boots for—?" He broke off.

"I think we can make a place for both of you round hereabouts," interrupted a quiet voice from the surrounding rocks.

Both men looked up sharply. A lanky figure leaning against a boulder, rifle pointed suggestively in their direction, met their gaze. Their surprise had been complete, and words failed them; but their hands slowly rose to a position above their shoulders. Now other voices were heard and they knew they were surrounded.

One of the armed men stepped back shouting as he waved his hand and the rest of the posse galloped up. "We got 'em; two of 'em, in fact."

The whole posse now milled around the two disarmed prisoners.

"Know anything about a recent holdup," questioned the lank deputy.

"Don't know a thing about any holdup," carefully answered the tall prisoner.

A rumble of voices rose from the angry men. "We oughter give them what for, and quick," roared one; "there's been too much of this stuff going on here of late!"

Others joined in, one grabbing and tearing the prisoner's sleeve.

"Get back, the lot of you," ordered Deputy Rodney, sternly, as he turned on his men. "We'll have no rough stuff. Let them pack their belongings and saddle up; we're going back to town." The men grumbled but did as they were bade. Soon the cavalcade was making its way back through the cut in the hills.

ON THEIR way to town they were crossing a far portion of the Gatlin range when presently they were joined by three riders. Jim Wells greeted Vince Gatlin who offered. "One of the boys brought the news about the posse, so I thought I'd come out an' join you. Who you got there?" and he nodded toward the two empty-holstered prisoners.

"Picked them two up 'round where those holdup men should have been. They don't carry any loot, so we're not sure who they are," answered Wells.

"Nobody in their right mind would be found in that desolate spot unless they were in hiding," Gatlin pointed out. "Ain't any trails through there that lead anyplace. Nobody goes in there but bandits and prospectors, and those two ain't prospectors. I'm for stringing them up on the next tree big enough to hold 'em."

Wells held up his hand to quiet Gatlin, "Now, take it easy, fellow. Can't combat outlawry with lawlessness, you know, so calm yourself and relax; be better that way."

The deputy spoke, "I'm not asking you, I'm telling you—I don't want to hear any more talk like that. We're getting these men back to town safe and in one piece each. Now let's ride!" Everyone within hearing understood the deputy's mood; after a while the normal babble of conversation was resumed to the accompaniment of hoofbeats.

Late that afternoon, the sheriff and the other half of the original posse rode into town, weary and dust-covered. A shout went up when they heard about the two prisoners now occupying a cell in the jail. The sheriff hurried inside with Tom, the holdup victim, followed by as many others as could fit into the small office.

"Sheriff, this is all a lot of foolishness. You didn't find any stolen property on us, you've got no proof. Let us go; we've seen enough of this part of the country. Now turn us loose!" demanded one of the prisoners when they had been brought from the cell.

The old sheriff waved his hand and laid his hat on the desk, "Hold on now, there are a few things we have to take care of first." He sat back in the old swivel chair and lit a smoke, then continued, "Tom, come over here and take a good look at these fellows. They the boys you had trouble with?"

Tom was beside him. A look of disappointment crept over his face. He'd hoped these were the bandits; then there might have been a chance of his getting his roll back.

"Sorry, sheriff, I don't recognize these men, and I got a good look at the face of one when his neckerchief mask slipped. No, these aren't the ones!"

Tom stood shaking his head. Then he began again, "But let's see their horses before they're turned loose; one of them had some fancy markings.

They trooped through the building and out the back door to the shed in the rear. Tom examined the prisoners' horses, but even as they came into view he was sure neither was the one he'd spoken about. Standing beside one he explained, "It was a paint and on the right rump there was a mark that looked something like a heart pointing down; only it had a longer point—like an arrowhead but thinner and sharper," and he traced out an imaginary figure with his finger.

"Well, that about settles that," said Jim Wells, turning to the sheriff. He, too, had hoped the bandits might be found. He walked slowly back to the hotel thinking of his own loss.

"I think, tomorrow, I'll go back and do a little scouting on my own," he mused as he settled back in one of the empty chairs on the hotel veranda. "It could just be that we didn't hunt in the right direction."

EARLY NEXT morning he was in the saddle, jogging loosely out of town. Half convinced that he should return to his own spread and forget the whole matter, he nevertheless continued. Where to look would be a problem. Bandits moved about as easily as any legitimate person and would not be likely to linger somewhere waiting to be apprehended. The scene of his own experience was a considerable distance from where Tom's holdup took place, and there was no similarity between the two methods of operation. These fellows could be hanging around anywhere, even back in town.

He thought of returning to see if anyone was throwing money around carelessly. This idea, he recognized as being worthless; there were many strange cowpokes—from distant ranches in town after a drive—who were bent on celebrating for a few days till their money petered out. Finally, he decided

to travel along a big circle back to his ranch as a sort of compromise. It would give him a chance to think if nothing else.

As the day wore on, it became quite hot. Low clouds hung over the not too distant mountains as he proceeded into a more hilly section. The foothills unfolded before him with tree clumps and heavier brush. "Bad place to have to hunt stray cattle," he observed, thinking of the many times he'd cussed at doing that very job.

He rounded the edge of a clump of thick cedars then instinctively hauled up and sidled his horse closer to the green cover. About half a mile away, across a little depression, a rider slowly made his way along the side of a hill. True, it might be someone else on the same errand as he but then he remembered Tom's mentioning a paint horse. Jim squinted as he peered across the valley. The white horse, with its bright rusty-red blotches, seemed to sparkle in the afternoon sun.

Quickly Jim circled back. He'd ride parallel, keeping under cover as much as possible. It shouldn't be difficult to keep hidden, for the other rider would have to look into the sun when watching in Jim's direction and besides, the clothes he wore and the horse he rode being of neutral colors, would all tend to make Jim blend into the scenery more readily.

The man kept riding in a southerly direction for about an hour; then Jim lost him as he took a sharp turn to the left and disappeared into a wooded ravine. Jim carefully picked his way across and entered the ravine himself, wondering as to the wisdom of following the trail of the other rider. He decided it was best not to, so he searched for a place where he could circle around and cut the trail ahead. As he was about to turn into the shelter of the bushes he noticed evidence that more than one rider had used this particular trail recently. Getting off that trail was then a very good idea, and Wells lost no time in letting the brush envelop him as he zigzaged among the trees up on the slope well out of sight.

He couldn't make much speed, for the woods were quite thick. Low boughs and fallen logs barred the way while dead branches scraped and tore at his clothes. By the nature of the slope and the huge rock pile to one side he judged that the ravine must be opening up into some sort of valley. He could not see very far in any one direction but he figured the trail would meander along at the foot of the slope. However, since the slope was gradually flattening out, he thought it best to check and find if he was still traveling in the right direction. A familiar sound came to him faintly, through the woodland. It came again and he unmistakably identified it as the nickering of a horse. He knew there must be a camp or rendezvous somewhere ahead.

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RIDING was now no longer safe. A horse could not steal silently along. Jim dismounted and tethered the animal in a clump of young trees. He advanced on foot and after finding the trail again, circled back through the brush. Time passed slowly as he crept quietly along. A voice came to him, then another.

They could not be very far ahead so he kept low, pausing often to check his position with the voices which now were much closer. He could almost make out what they were talking about. A few yards further he noted that the trees thinned out indicating the fact that there was probably a clearing not far ahead. Good cover was harder to

find and once he saw a figure move. He circled around and came close where several large trees grew together in a small group. From here he could see most of what was going on and make out some of the conversation.

"This'll be no cinch but it should pay well." The voice sounded very familiar. Jim could see the faces of four men, all strangers but he couldn't make out the identity of the two with their backs to him. They stood in a little group near a small fire. The voice continued, "And I don't want to hear about any more holdups in this locality. Sometime, something will slip; just because I had you lift Jim Wells' roll, that time, doesn't mean that we should start an epidemic of that sort of thing."

Jim was aghast. The speaker turned his head a little at the same moment the sound of his voice registered in Jim's memory. The man was Vince Gatlin. Jim flattened, belly down between the two tree trunks. He didn't bother to watch any more as his ears could pick up all the information he wanted. He waited and listened. They were planning something to surprise the gentle citizens of Arrowhead Springs. Jim couldn't hear just what and he didn't care to spend any more time in that particular vicinty. He'd heard enough and there were too many men involved for him to tackle alone.

Slowly and cautiously he wormed his way back. This would be a very bad time to make any unusual noise. He kept glancing toward where the bandits were clustered; every slight sound he made was multiplied an hundredfold in his imagination and after each indiscreet move he paused, his ears alert, his eyes intent.

The men were out of sight now and their voices more indistinct. Jim felt he could straighten up and after retreating a bit further, perhaps make a dash for his horse. He hoped he could remember exactly where he had it tethered. He relaxed. "Calm yourself, boy," he told himself, "Don't go gettin' rattled now. You got here an' you can get back; jes' use your head."

He smiled quietly, his eyes fastened on the bushes around the edge of the clearing. He gathered his legs under himself and stood. This felt better. Turning to beat a more speedy retreat he stopped short and his whole body stiffened.

"I figure you an' me better have a little talk!" The words fell softly from the drawling lips of a pleasant-faced, lanky man who lazily held a big .45 steadily pointed at Jim's middle. It was the friendly puncher he had met at Gatlin's corral that day. "Vince ain't gonna like this one little bit." The puncher assumed a serious mein and shook his head slowly. "He don't go for violence—but right now, you know just a little bit too much. Too bad! I been watchin' you back away from that clearin'. Now turn around and I'll relieve you of any foolish temptations!"

JIM TURNED his back on the puncher. He felt the muzzle of the .45 rest firmly against his back as the weight of his own gun was removed from its holster. His mind raced, realizing what the near future held.

There was still a chance, the last; slim, but still a chance. He whirled to the left, his elbow knocking the .45 to one side as it exploded. His right fist plowed into the jaw of the puncher and with the left hand he grasped the puncher's gun wrist. They crashed to the ground. Jim's right hand grabbed the barrel of the revolver and twisted it up and back, sharply. The puncher's finger was twisted and broken as the gun again fired. Jim leaped to his feet and men broke through the leafy screen around the clearing. He ran, seeking cover and firing back.

There was an exchange of gunfire but all too soon Jim's captured .45 was empty. His own gun, a .38 lay back

near the dazed puncher. He dropped the gun and ran, being now hidden by the brush. His feet pounded the earth and he fairly flew through the rough woods. Pandemonium broke out to his rear. Bullets cut through the branches as his pursuers fired blindly. The going was as tough for them as it was for him.

Two men continued the pursuit while the rest ran shouting for their horses. Jim was unarmed but his horse was just ahead. There was still a chance!

It felt good to hear the hoofs pounding under him as he rode, bent low over the pommel. He sought the trail and one of the unmounted pursuers caught sight of him. A bullet screamed by, very close. A sharp, dead branch tore his leg and blood ran down into his boot, staining his levis. His shirt was in rags and his hat tumbled back and hung on a bush. He found the trail and raced round a curve. Other hoofs thundered behind him, too close, and there was a shout.

He sped through the ravine and out into the open country. There was no other way to go. He had hoped that there would be a chance to make it to a more civilized spot or to his ranch but he'd need a bigger lead to accomplish that. A sharp turn to the right brought him quickly to the top of a low ridge and he disappeared down the other side as his pursuers emerged from the ravine. Unfortunately, he had not been in time for they spotted him and swept around on his trail.

It was touch-and-go from then on. The roughness of the country protected him but how long he could keep this up became a frightening uncertainty. He and his horse had come a long way since morning and now the mount began to falter. The animal's legs were painfully cut and bruised but it pushed on valiantly. As if to add drama to the situation, a storm hung low over the mountain. Distant daggers of lightning stabbed through the sky and thunder rumbled and echoed across the valleys.

Jim glanced back as he crossed a higher piece of ground. They seemed to be gaining; they should be—his horse was lagging.

More gunfire from behind, soon—then he felt a shock as his horse stiffened and went down. He'd been alert to this possibility. His toes automatically disengaged themselves from the stirrups and he slid over the horse's sagging neck. Alighting, he jumped to one side as the horse went heels over head and finally lay still. Not waiting to watch, Jim plunged down the slope and into the thick brush at the bottom. By the time his pursuers came into view, he was out of sight. They spread out and advanced, to come to a halt in a half circle at the foot of the opposing hill. The thick tangle of brush among the scattered boulders was too heavy for a horse to slip through. They knew where Jim was, but they'd have to search him out.

HE WINCED as a sharp stone scraped his knee and he inched his way through a heavy thicket to come to his feet. There was still a chance but his only path to escape lay up the hill and over the ridge. It would be close.

Unarmed and hatless, he dodged through the brush and among the boulders, his body hunched low as he ran. A little shiver of fear swept over Jim Wells when, pausing to catch his breath, he glanced behind at the grim silhouettes of his pursuers. They were gaining on him, for they had no need to crouch and search out cover for themselves; and they knew he was near.

Knowing the identity of those who wanted to remain obscure made Wells a hunted man. Vince Gatlin, respectable rancher, businessman, irreproachable member of his community and undercover lawless operator now shouted

orders, commands that seemed to be punctuated by the vivid streaks of lightning and rumbling thunder which reached out from the black storm proceeding up the valley. It all presented an ominous threat, and Jim Wells turned to face the rocky ridge and the darkness of night that advanced from the east.

Now he hastened for the gentle trickle of the stream across in the valley would soon become a roaring flood and all escape would be blocked. The outlaw band, too, quickened its pace. With the coming of night and the darkness of storm their prey could vanish in the brushy, rock-strewn wilderness. They advanced, bristling with weapons, in their grim quest.

Veering to the left to take advantage of the better cover afforded there, Jim discovered a man with alerted rifle, pressing forward to cut him off. He slipped cautiously from bush to bush, on up the rocky defile. Crawling on his knees, inching along on his belly or, when circumstance allowed, running, bent low, he managed to reach the top of the ridge unobserved. Unaware of his exact whereabouts, his pursuers slowed their advance to search through every clump of thick brush among the boulders.

Wells glanced back. The mountains across the valley were obscured behind wavering sheets of rain. Incessant lightning garishly illuminated the otherwise darkening landscape. Vince Gatlin advanced rapidly toward the crest of the ridge, alone, as Jim snaked over to the downward slope on the other side.

From a new vantage point he easily discerned the gentle ripple of the stream. Escape in that direction, across the creek to the shelter of the tall timber, was within reach. He rose to make a run for it, then suddenly, threw himself upon his face, callously ignoring the tough twigs of the low bush that clawed his skin. Below him an armed man climbed to the top of a large boulder from whence to scan the slope. Further to the right there was another.

Jim squirmed into the dark crevice beneath a rock as he heard a stone rattle and slide amidst the thunder's roar as Vince Gatlin halted on the high ground nearby. Rifle ready, Gatlin's cold, hawkish eyes peered across the gloomy ridge. The lightning flashed and his gaze fastened on Jim's hiding place, to linger for a few moments, then move on. Jim froze in his position knowing that the shadow, if nothing else, hid him from view.

THE MEN were advancing up the west slope of the ridge and Gatlin turned to bark an order. He searched the area ahead of them with his eyes, the hunter waiting on the trail, while his beaters worked. Jim grew tense; the sharp stones beneath his body cut and his cramped form began to ache. Soon they would flush him. That would be the end, a sudden one! Make a run for it—? He missed that chance when he discovered the two guards below, near the creek. He'd be cut down like a fleeing deer.

The storm approached, and a desperate thought flashed in Wells' mind. Advancing curtains of rain blotted out more and more of the landscape and

Jim turned his attention back toward Gatlin. He found himself directly under the questioning scrutiny of the bandit, but now, that was what he wanted, Jim Wells' blood ran cold as a double streak of lightning flashed behind the hunter; the man's foolhardy position was Jim's only hope, it seemed.

Vince Gatlin no longer questioned. His bellow of recognition was drowned by the crack and roar of thunder as his rifle snapped up. Lightning flashed again; Jim stiffened and rolled, then slithered behind another rock as tiny chips of stone sprayed about him. He'd stay here and keep Gatlin standing out there. Speeding bullets flattened against his protecting barrier.

This is it, thought Jim; it must come soon, one way or another. Gatlin straightened, swung his rifle in a high arc and bellowed. Speeded by the wind, large drops of rain splattered about with a scattering of hailstones, smashing and bouncing among the boulders.

A livid flash flooded the darkened landscape. It seemed to rise heavenward from Vince Gatlin's high-flung rifle muzzle. Gatlin's body stiffened as purple fire enveloped him and danced in little rivulets at his feet and a thunderous crack of doom quivered the earth.

The swift waters of the swollen creek swirled and sucked at Jim's legs after the stumbling dash down the slope. He struggled for firmer footing, regarding with apprehension the danger of being swept away. There was still a chance to make a crossing, though the going would be rough. His shoulders and back stung from the pelting hail and he could not see ten feet ahead through the descending torrent. He remembered old Uncle Gadby's comment of long ago, *In one of them electric storms, a rocky, mountain ridge is no place for any man.*

But then, neither was a mountain creek during a cloudburst!

★

A Complete Pocketbook Western Novel Never Before Published in Book Form

Too many people knew that the notorious Finger Harday was still alive! And one by one, these unfortunates were being executed by a lobo band known as the Hangman Bunch.

Art McLee, riding the vengeance trail in search of Harday found himself up against

TRIGGER TRIBE

by T. W. Ford

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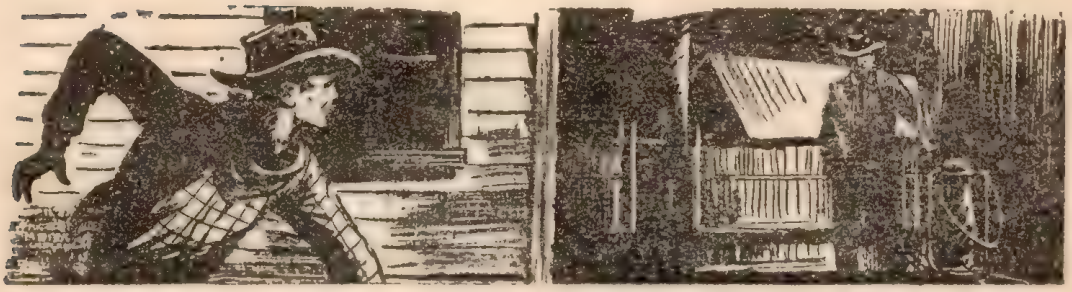
Expenses were up, and production records were off at the Anvil ranch in Saguache. That could mean that extra gunhands were being hired, could mean powdersmoke trouble with neighbors. Gar Anderson had been sent to find out, and it looked as if too many people didn't intend to let him live that long.



TRIGGER TRAIL

NOVELET OF BOOTHILL GREED

by Jim Brewer

TRAILING a huge cloud of dust, the stagecoach swayed down a grade, jolted along an even stretch of sunbaked road, and lurched up a hill. Inside, the lone passenger sprawled as comfortably as possible across both seats and gazed listlessly at the landscape of desert trees and gray-green Spanish bayonet through which he was passing. Having long since accustomed himself to the motion of the coach, he had nothing to combat now except the ennui which had settled over him as soon as he had caught up on his sleep.

Gar Anderson, his mind dulled by three days of travel, felt a dissatisfaction with himself. Heretofore, he had accepted a new assignment with eagerness and looked forward to pitting his wits against whatever problem he was given to solve. But this time he felt an impatience with his job, as though he could direct his energy into a more-

important channel. Brood as he might however, he could discover no reason for his new outlook.

Irritably, he went back over his meeting with Shaughnessy at Silver City. He had just broken up a band of rustlers at Great Western's Lightning ranch, and the supervisor had wired him to wait for him at the Cattleman's Hotel.

Two days later Shaughnessy had shown up and given him his instructions. "Go up to Saguache," he had said. "We've got a ranch there, the Anvil brand. Find out what's wrong. Expenses are up and production records are off. Frank Hastings is our manager and, though his reports show that nothing is out of the way, we understand there's a range war brewing. Take a good look around and give us a report with your recommendations."

Gar had asked several questions and Shaughnessy had answered in his terse, direct way. When Gar had finally nodded his understanding, he pulled a bottle from the drawer of the night stand in his room and offered the supervisor a drink.

Shaughnessy had looked at him in a peculiar way, and that must have started it. "Gawd!" the supervisor had exclaimed. "This hour of the morning!"

Gar had flushed. "Sure. Why not?"

Shaughnessy had scrutinized him carefully. "That stuff will kill you or ruin you in time. How old are you, Gar?"

"Twenty-seven."

"And the best damn trouble-shooter Great Western Cattle Association has got!" He had studied Anderson another full minute. "You got a girl?" he asked suddenly.

Gar had looked at him as though he were crazy. "No!" he said. "I haven't got time for a girl. I move around too much. Anyway, I lead a life too dangerous to be shared."

"Hogwash!" Shaughnessy had exclaimed. "You're making excuses. Everybody should have someone with whom he can share his triumphs and disappointments—particularly you fellows who say you don't need a wife."

Gar had said nothing.

"I know!" Shaughnessy had warmed to his subject. "I was a hardhead just like you, but I learned. I'm the happiest married man in the world now." He paused. "I tell you what. You find yourself a girl, marry her, and I'll make you the manager of the best damn ranch we got. You're too good a man to lose."

Gar remembered that he had looked at Shaughnessy critically. Maybe the supervisor needed a woman, he thought contemptuously, but he didn't. Women tied a man down, pampered him, weakened him. He'd started with nothing and worked his way this far on his own determination and initiative. And he was going to climb a hell of a lot higher up the ladder of success and no woman was going to tie him down and hinder him.

But he couldn't have put those thoughts into words. Shaughnessy wouldn't have understood. He had simply grinned and thanked the supervisor for the advice. "I'll take you up on that," he had said dismissing the subject.

Shaughnessy had looked at him shrewdly and said no more.

THE STAGECOACH made another grade and the driver stopped to rest the horses. Gar listlessly let his eyes rest on the ceiling, and suddenly the coach was surrounded by masked riders.

"Keep your hands in the air, driver!" a harsh voice shouted.

Before Gar could collect his wits, a man had leaped from a horse, thrown open the door, and leveled a six-gun at him. "All right, you, come out of there!"

Cursing himself for having been caught so easily, Gar followed instructions. On the frontier, alertness was the price of survival, and even though

these men were apparently mistaking him for someone else, he had committed the cardinal sin of letting himself be surprised.

His captor pushed him roughly to the side of the road. The man on the horse who was covering the driver spoke without glancing at Gar.

"Whip up those horses, and if you stop this side of Saguache, you'll get a slug between the eyes!"

The driver snapped his whip and the stage rumbled away in a cloud of dust. In a moment it was around a bend and out of sight, its noise diminishing as it drew farther away.

Behind him, his captor drew Gar's gun from its holster, and the three mounted men wheeled their horses to regard him over their masks.

"Search him!" the leader ordered.

The man on foot went quickly through his pockets. He relieved Gar of his papers and carried them to the man who was giving the instructions.

Anderson stood quietly while the leader went through the credentials. He was certain these men were looking for someone else as no one except the manager of Anvil knew he was coming. They would doubtless leave him on foot but unharmed when they learned of their mistake.

"It's him!" the man on horseback said.

Gar started. Something was decidedly wrong. Usually his coming was a secret between Shaughnessy, the ranch manager, and himself. And on this assignment he had expected no trouble; he had reasoned that a certain element in the area probably resented a policy of Anvil and that a change in the policy along with changes in ranch personnel would iron things out.

"Men," he said, "Great Western sent me here to smooth any difficulties which might have arisen. If you have any grievances, I'll be glad to listen to them."

"Shut up!" the leader said.

He took a coil of rope from his saddle and shook out a loop. He tossed the noose over Gar's neck and tied his end of the rope to the saddle horn. He pulled down the neckerchief he was using as a mask, exposing a lean, sadistic face, and regarded Gar.

"We aim to show you outsiders that we don't want your kind in Tulaga Basin. When we get through with you we're going to hang your body from a tree so others will see it and stay away."

A chill went through Gar at the lack of feeling in the man's words. He realized the seriousness of the situation and his mind worked quickly, trying to find a way of saving himself. "But I don't understand?" he said, stalling desperately for time. "What have you got against me?"

"We got nothing against you," was the answer. "But Anvil ranch is part of the basin. You're working for Great Western and you came to meddle in basin affairs. We like the way things are going; we don't want your kind in here!"

THE MAN'S talk puzzled Gar. "Are you working for or against Anvil?" he asked.

The man grinned mirthlessly. "Mister, from now on you ain't going to care." He looked at his companions and they all laughed unpleasantly.

"See this rope?" The man indicated the lariat around Gar's neck. "As long as you keep up with my horse, you'll be all right. But the minute you start to slow down, the noose will tighten—cutting off your wind. If you slow down more, it will pull you off your feet and drag you!"

Gar's heart seemed to freeze as he realized what was in store for him. The leader of the band intended to play with him, tease him along by moving his horse just slow enough so Gar could keep up with it by running. When he tired of the sport, he would spur the horse and drag Gar, choking, after the mustang until he was dead.

"Why don't you hang me, or shoot me, and have it over with?"

There was a streak of cruelty in the man. "That would be too easy," he said, and laughed mirthlessly again.

Gar's lips tightened. He spat contemptuously into the dust.

The leader grinned at Gar's reaction and touched spurs to his horse.

The man on the horse looked back and grinned. He tickled his mount's flanks again with his spurs and the animal moved along at a faster rate of speed. The rope tightened and the noose slipped close around Gar's neck; the trouble-shooter had to break into a run to keep the rope from cutting off his wind.

Within a very few moments, Gar began to tire. He wasn't used to walking, and the running pace began to tell on him; his breath began to come in short gasps and a pain started in his side. And his boots, made for the stirrup and not walking, began to hurt.

The man on the horse looked back, laughing now, and Gar wondered how much longer he could keep up the pace. The other again touched spurs to his horse and the mount moved forward a little faster.

This time, Gar could not keep up with the animal. The noose tightened around his neck and shut off his wind. Frightened, he tried to run faster, but he tripped over a stone and fell. The rope tightened around his neck like some gigantic vise and dragged him in its wake.

Struggling vainly for wind, he felt brush and rocks tear at his clothes and body. He felt earth slip by under him and knew that in a moment he would be done. Suddenly a shot sounded. His forward motion ceased. With his remaining strength he loosened the rope around his neck and lifted it free. Then, panting for breath, he let himself lie face down on the ground, trying to let strength ooze back into his exhausted muscles.

"Get off those horses!" he heard a feminine voice shout.

WITH A great effort, he lifted his head. His captors were pulled up in a row behind him. They were dismounting in accordance with their instructions. He looked around. Before him, the horse that had been leading him lay dead; the leader of the band stood beside it holding an arm as though he were in pain. Apparently his rescuer had shot and killed the horse, somersaulting the man from the saddle.

"Take your guns from your holsters and drop them on the ground!" the voice ordered. "And be careful, 'cause one wrong move and I'll shoot!"

Gingerly, the men followed instructions. Gar Anderson looked about for his savior and saw a saddled horse by several boulders. A rifle muzzle protruded from the rocks, and Gar knew that the person who had rescued him was crouched behind the cover of the stones.

"Now," the feminine voice continued, "start walking!"

"You're not going to leave us without horses!" one of the men protested.

A shot sounded from the rocks and a bullet dug up dirt by the man's feet. Startled, the men started to walk. After a moment, the rifle spoke again and they broke into a run. Within a few minutes they were several hundred yards away and still moving.

A girl rose from the rocks and came toward Gar. She was a trim brunette dressed in sunfaded men's clothes. Her expression was one of concern as she knelt by him. "Are you all right?"

The trouble-shooter sat up. He was still trying to get his wind, and his neck was raw and sore; but he grinned at the girl and nodded. "I guess so."

After a moment, he said: "My name is Anderson, Gar Anderson. They took me off the stage and were going to make an example of me."

The girl frowned. "Are you the

trouble-shooter Great Western is sending here?"

He nodded.

She turned red with anger. "I wish I'd known that! I'd have let them kill you!"

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SURPRISED, Gar Anderson stared at the girl. "What do you mean?" he asked angrily.

"Just what I said!" The girl rose to her feet and whistled to her horse. The animal responded and she swung into the saddle. Without a backward look, she spurred away.

Astonished, Gar watched her ride into the distance. He had had little contact with womenfolk before, and he tended to shy away from them. But this girl seemed to be different.

Scooping up his guns and holstering them, he caught one of the horses. He scattered the other mustangs in the direction opposite the one his late captors had taken and rode after the girl.

She was not traveling very fast, and in a few moments he caught up with her. She ignored him and for several minutes they rode in silence. "I want to thank you for saving my life," Gar ventured.

"Forget it."

They rode in silence for another few minutes. "Look," Gar tried again, "I don't know why everyone in this basin wants me dead, but I came here to harm no one."

She ignored him and sniffed contemptuously.

Angered, he caught her reins. "Will you listen to me?"

The horses stopped and she turned cold eyes on him. "Keep your hands off my horse! Great Western may think it owns everything in sight, but so long as I can fight it don't own me!"

"Great Western doesn't want you or anything you own!" Gar retorted, conscious that he sounded like some small boy in an argument.

"Then why are they trying to drive us out?" she asked. "Why are they raiding and rustling the small ranches?"

Gar studied her. The managers of Great Western's ranches had orders to live as amicably as possible with their neighbors. It was a company policy calculated to increase efficiency by promoting better relations.

"If Anvil is doing all that, it's doing so without the knowledge and sanction of the higher-ups."

The girl looked at him skeptically. "Sure. Then why did they send you out here?"

Gar hesitated. It was not his policy to discuss business with anybody. The fact that news of his coming had leaked angered him and he intended to let someone know of his feelings. And he was going to make sure that his movements and investigations from now on were shrouded in secrecy.

"I can't tell you that, lady," he said. "But I didn't come here to make things tough for the small ranchers."

"I'd like to believe that," she said. "You have my word on it."

The phrase was evidently familiar to her, for she frowned. She caught up her reins. "Your word and the word of Frank Hastings! One is probably as good as the other. Mr. Anderson, I'd trust you and Great Western as far as I'd trust a coiled rattler!" She wheeled her horse and rode away.

GAR WATCHED her go, his forehead wrinkled. He had evidently blundered into a bigger game than he'd reckoned on. And, apparently, the manager of Anvil, Frank Hastings, was

playing over and under the table. But he warned himself not to form any opinions until he had a chance to weigh all the evidence.

He had come across similar happenings where someone other than the syndicate ranch had done the harassing and placed the blame on the company; that could be the case here. Still, the girl had seemed positive that Great Western was behind the trouble.

He spurred his horse back to the road and followed its rutted way. In an hour or so he came to Saguache, two rows of sun-warped buildings on either side of the thoroughfare. He saw the stagecoach drawn up before the depot and halted beside it for his belongings.

The driver was talking to a man with a lawman's star on his vest and waving his arms as he described the holdup. He saw Gar and stopped in mid-motion. "Here's the young fellar, now."

Gar swung down and the lawman, an elderly man with a white mustache, came limping unenthusiastically toward him. "What's your story, son?" he asked.

Gar recounted his adventure, and ended by saying, "They should be still out there on foot; if you hurry, you might catch them before they can get the two horses."

The sheriff nodded, but from his obvious reluctance to start, Gar knew that he wasn't too eager to catch the outlaws and probably wouldn't. The trouble-shooter eyed the lawman with distaste. Suddenly a thought struck him. "Who is that girl?" he asked.

The sheriff chuckled. "Sounds to me like Bea Miller," he said.

"Young fellar!" the stage driver said in his ear. "Frank Hastings is going to be mighty glad to see you. He met the coach and was put out when he heard about the holdup."

The lawman moved away and Gar turned to the driver. "Good. Where can I find him?"

"He just went into the *Starlight*."

Gar thanked him and headed for the building across the street with *Starlight Saloon* in rude letters emblazoned over the swinging doors. Inside, he asked a barkeep for Frank Hastings and was directed to a man halfway down the wooden counter. He moved along the bar, tapped the man on the shoulder and introduced himself.

THE MANAGER turned to face him, and for a moment his face reflected astonishment. Then he smiled heartily and extended his hand. "Well! That's a relief!" he said. "You had me mighty worried when the driver came in alone and told of the holdup."

As Gar shook the man's hand, he studied him. He saw a man of average height and breadth with an open, cheerful face. Here was a man who would be welcomed into any group, a good mixer and a cheerful companion. But something about the man made Gar think of a politician or a high-pressure saleman.

"Let's go where we can talk," Gar suggested.

"Sure," Hastings agreed. "Charlie, a bottle of my special over here." He led the way to a corner table while a barkeep followed with a bottle of liquor and two glasses.

They seated themselves and the manager opened the liquor and poured the glasses. He pushed one to Gar and took one himself. "Here's to your lucky escape," he said.

Gar frowned, then downed the drink. It was good liquor, better than he could afford. Hastings filled the glasses again.

"Now," the manager said, "tell me what happened."

For the second time, Gar recounted his adventure. Hastings listened with a frown and when the trouble-shooter had finished, shook his head. "I'm glad Shaughnessy sent you," he said. "That's just a sample of what I'm up against."

Gar said nothing, waiting for Hastings to elaborate.

"The small ranchers," the manager continued, "have been making my life miserable. They've been rustling my stock, cutting my fences, and taking shots at my riders. In order to protect myself, I've had to keep a bigger crew than I ought to need—which is why my expenses are high, and most likely why you were sent here."

Gar remembered his talk with the girl and remarked the similarity between her complaint and the one of Hastings. "Why do you suppose the small ranchers are giving you trouble?" he asked.

Hastings shrugged his shoulders. "I don't really know," he said. "Except that with the lower margin of profit in beef prices they have to produce in volume to make a living. They can't do that with the size of their present spreads; they probably figure that if they can make Anvil show a consistent loss, Great Western will sell and they can divide the spread among themselves."

Gar frowned. Though the manager's words made sense, they were not logical. His experience with groups of men had shown him the difficulty of getting them all to agree on one purpose. He doubted that the small ranchers could have worked out a long range program such as the one Hastings suggested. Then, too, if it came to a range war, Great Western could send in enough gunmen to make the fracas one sided and the small ranchers would realize that.

"How do you suppose they found out about my coming?" he asked.

The manager scowled. "I don't know. As I've said, I've had a big crew. One of them must have stumbled across the letter and the information leaked through him. News like that spreads like water, especially with the basin in this condition, and before I could do anything about it everybody knew."

Gar nodded, but he was far from satisfied. Hastings had a safe to which only he had access. Anything of a confidential nature, such as Shaughnessy's letter, should have been kept in that safe.

He was far from impressed with Hastings. He glanced out the window at the mid-afternoon sun. "Suppose we go out to Anvil," he suggested. "It's too late to do anything now, but in the morning I want to go over your records. Then I think I'll ride around the basin and have a talk with some of the small ranchers."

Hastings smiled, but his eyes were thoughtful. "Fine. Charlie," he called to the barkeep, "I'm going to take this bottle with me. Put it on my bill, will you."

They left the saloon. The sheriff had impounded the horse Gar had ridden into town, so the trouble-shooter hired a roan gelding from the livery stable. They left Saguache and headed east.

AS GAR had suspected, Hastings was a good companion. They traveled across the miles of grazing land and he kept Gar entertained with stories and jokes of different escapades in which he and his different punchers had engaged. The trouble-shooter felt himself warming to the man, for he had an engaging personality; but Gar's job had taken him to many ranches and brought him into contact with many men, and he had learned that it isn't always the man to whom you are drawn who is the most dependable.

Accordingly, he took the manager's attempts to ingratiate himself for just what they were worth. By the same token, he kept a careful watch of the trail they were pursuing for he wanted to orient himself.

They drew rein at the entrance of a brush-choked canyon, and the manager looked at Gar. "Do you mind if we go in here for just a moment? Anvil has a line-camp in the canyon and I'd like to check on the punchers."

Gar didn't mind, in fact he catalogued the information, and they

followed a pathway through the brush. After a time, they emerged into a clearing. A small cabin sat against one of the walls of the canyon, and Hastings led Gar toward it.

A wisp of smoke curled from the cabin's metal chimney, and several horses stood in the corral at one side. Gar noted the horses and a feeling of danger sent a signal through his mind. He recognized two of the horses as the ones ridden by the men who had taken him from the stagecoach!

Gar started to wheel his horse, but Hastings turned in the saddle and a blued-steel revolver that must have come from a shoulder holster was yawning at the trouble-shooter.

"Hold it!" Hastings cried.

Gar glanced at him and the cabin beyond him. He knew that he could expect mercy from neither Hastings nor his men. And his best chance lay in escaping while he was being held by only one man.

He raised his hands docilely and walked his horse toward the cabin. "That's it!" Hastings said. "Keep going!"

Hands in the air, Gar tensed. As the mount passed Hastings, he whipped the hat from his head into Hastings' face. At the same moment he launched himself from the saddle at the manager.

The hat momentarily blinded Hastings, but he pulled the trigger. His gun roared and the slug burned across Gar's side. The next moment the trouble-shooter struck the manager and the force of his leap swept Hastings from the saddle and the two men fell to the ground.

Gar leaped to his feet and drove a fist at Hastings. The manager, halfway to his feet, fell back to the earth. The door of the cabin banged open and, glancing over his shoulder, Gar saw the occupants coming at a run.

He turned to run for his horse only to have the manager grab his boot and trip him. The next moment Hastings was atop him, battering his face with stunning fists.

With a supreme effort, Gar twisted the manager beneath him. He drove another fist at his face and felt Hastings weaken. Again he struck and the manager ceased his struggling.

Gar started to get to his feet, but at that moment the men from the linecamp reached him; they fell upon him, and a blow to his head sent him spinning into blackness.

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GAR gradually regained his senses. Opening his eyes the merest slit, he glanced about. He was tied securely to a chair in the cabin. Hastings and the four men who had taken him from the stage sat about a rude table. Apparently they had just finished a meal for the dishes were still before them.

One of the men indicated Gar. "You took a chance, bringing him here in broad daylight."

Hastings cut the end from a cigar and inserted it into his mouth. "I know," he said, "but I couldn't afford to let him get to Anvil; I had to get him out of the way fast!"

"Let me take care of him right now," another begged. "I want to get even."

From the corner of his eye, Gar saw that this man had his wrist bandaged. He was the one who had been in charge of the others during the stagecoach incident, and it had been his horse Bea Miller's shot had killed. Apparently he had hurt his wrist in the fall from the horse.

Hastings looked contemptuously at this man. "You had your chance. I'm afraid if I give you another, Anderson might break your arm this time instead of just spraining your wrist."

The others laughed, and Hastings allowed a smile to steal cross his face. When the mirth had died, he spoke again.

"As long as he's here, we might as well make use of him. The small ranchers suspect that I'm trying to drive them out of the basin. By banding together they think they can stalemate me. But they're not sure about Great Western; so if we raid one of the ranches tonight and after we leave they find this trouble-shooter's body, they'll think he was one of the attackers and that the syndicate is trying to drive them out. And I don't think many of them have the stomach to fight an outfit of Great Western's size!"

Here then, Gar thought, were the instigators of all the trouble. Hastings and these four men carrying out his schemes. For some reason of his own the Anvil manager wanted the small ranchers driven from the basin, and he was playing a game in which there was no limit on the stakes in order to accomplish his purpose.

Hastings blew a rich cloud of smoke into the air. "It'll have to be the Miller ranch. The girl's the only one who knows Anderson by sight."

"Ed," the manager addressed one of the men, "saddle the horses!"

Ed nodded and left. The man with the sprained wrist drew his six-shooter. "Can I kill him now?"

Hastings looked contemptuously again at this outlaw. "No, you fool! He'd be stiff by the time we left him in front of the Miller place and they'd suspect something. We'll have to keep him alive until sometime during the raid."

SCOWLING, the outlaw looked down at the table. Hastings swung around and looked at Gar. The trouble-shooter opened his eyes and returned the look.

"Well," the manager said pleasantly, "finally came out of it, did you?"

Gar said nothing and Hastings laughed. "That was a foolish try to escape; you could have saved yourself a lot of headache by surrendering peacefully."

Gar still said nothing and Hastings laughed again and turned back to the table. "This will be just a small raid," he said. "We'll fire a couple of buildings so they won't realize our main purpose was to leave the body."

Gar watched and listened to Hastings and he could hardly believe his senses. Here was a man planning arson and murder as pleasantly as if he were making a move in a game of checkers.

The manager carefully outlined a plan for the raid, assigning different jobs to his men. He cautioned the outlaws on their timing, and went over the attack a second time to insure against a slip-up.

"George," Hastings gave his last instruction to the man with the sprained wrist, "you ride herd on Anderson. Tie his hands to the horn and make sure they stay tied. When I give you the signal, cut the ropes and plug him; and this time don't slip up!"

Despite himself, Gar had to give the Anvil manager credit for his shrewdness. His plan for the raid was simple and brilliant, and he had given the task of watching Gar to the man who had a personal interest in the trouble-shooter, and so would be least likely to botch the job.

Ed came in to announce that the horses were saddled and Hastings assigned him a task in the raid. Then two of the outlaws untied Gar and led him outside. He was forced to mount a horse and his hands were lashed firmly to the horn.

The outlaws mounted and, led by Hastings, moved their horses in a southerly direction. Night had fallen and a quarter moon cast a dim light over the trail. With George leading his mustang, Gar brought up the rear of the cavalcade.

They traveled slowly keeping, Gar imagined, to the lesser-used trails. As soon as the monotony of the journey had relaxed his guard's vigilance, Gar tested his bonds; the ropes had been pulled tightly into his flesh and the knots tied by a master. Straining at the lashings only cut off his circulation and after a few minutes of testing the bonds Gar realized he had no hope of loosening them.

He turned over in his mind several other possibilities for escape and admitted to himself that they were hopeless. He was dealing with a group of men who were ruthless and intended to kill him. They had kept him alive this far only to serve their purpose and any suggestion of an attempt that might result in his escape would only cancel that consideration.

AFTER a two hour journey they drew up just below the skyline of a ridge. Below them were the peaceful lights of a ranch. They sat studying the scene for several moments while Hastings gave orders in a low voice.

Two of the men were sent in a wide flanking maneuver to come up behind a barn and a tool shed. The Anvil manager was giving them fifteen minutes in which to get into position and light their respective fires. Then he and the other men, leading Gar, would charge directly toward the ranch firing, shouting and creating a diversion. The other would join the party and while George led Gar away to where he could keep an eye on him the rest of them would circle the buildings like Indians, keeping the defenders under cover and unable to save the burning buildings. Sometime during the last maneuver George would shoot Gar and leave his body for the defenders to find.

After the flankers had faded into the darkness the three outlaws drew their mounts together and conversed in low tones. George held the reins of Gar's mount so the trouble-shooter was powerless to control the mustang himself.

The time dragged slowly as they waited for the first sign of fire. Hastings held a pocket watch in his hand so he could know the actual passage of the minutes. Like soldiers waiting for the moment of attack, their nerves keyed to a higher and higher pitch.

Gar kept his eyes glued to the dim shape of the ranch below them, expecting to see the flickering glow of the flames at any moment. Hastings put away his watch and announced that the flankers' time was up. Gar began to hope that something had gone wrong.

But a sudden spot of flame burst from an area somewhat behind the ranchhouse. Almost immediately another glow on a line with the first appeared and, like two giant eyes, they signalled the attack.

Even as Gar watched the flames mushroomed and cast a widening circle of light about the ranch. Someone gave an alarm and two small figures ran from the house.

Spurring their mounts the outlaws, leading Gar, topped the ridge and galloped toward the ranch. They began shooting and shouting, and to the unsuspecting people below they must have sounded like a large raiding party.

The two figures ran back into the house and in a moment the lights were extinguished. Answering shots punctuated the night and the outlaws began circling the buildings, still yelling and shooting as they rode. They were joined in several moments by the flankers who complemented the circle.

Desperately now, as George left the attackers and led Gar to one side where they could watch the raid, Anderson fought the bonds holding his wrists for he knew that his time was running out. Disregarding the pain as his struggles lacerated his wrists, he worked the ropes back and forth. But it was no use! The lashings held as though they were wire.

With a sinking heart he watched the flames shoot higher into the air as they ate into the buildings. Soon, he knew, the structures would be beyond saving and that time was his doom!

The outlaws galloped in their circle, shooting into the buildings, their faces deranged into maniacal pictures of fury as their emotions keyed to the violence of the scene. They were like madmen, shooting with no thought of target as the paroxysm worked to a climax.

The shots directed at them were ineffectual, as though the suddenness of the attack had caught the defenders unprepared and they were making a token defense while they waited for their senses to coordinate.

Higher and wilder the flames climbed and crackled. Faster galloped the outlaws and more sporadically came their shots as they emptied their guns and reloaded.

But Gar saw Hastings pull his horse to one side, his face cold and calculating as he watched the fires. He watched the buildings himself now as the flames leaped even higher into the air and the circle of light spread outward even farther.

There was a roar and a portion of the barn fell away. Hay stored in the structure had helped feed the flames and now there was no hope of saving the part still standing.

Gar heard a shout and Hastings was waving at George. The outlaw grinned and his hand slid to his boot. It reappeared an instant later with a gleaming knife. One slash and Gar's numbed hands fell away from the horn. And the pistol in George's other hand came up to aim at the trouble-shooter!

THERE WAS no feeling in Gar's wrists or hands. But he fell forward, clasped his hands around his mustang's neck, and plunged his spurs into the mount's flanks. The startled animal leaped away and broke into a run.

George shot and the bullet burned across Gar's back. The outlaw's next bullet whined harmlessly overhead and he shouted, giving the alarm. Gar's desperate eyes saw the outlaws turn and begin to converge upon him, their guns roaring.

The trouble-shooter slid Indian-fashion around the body of his horse, so only an arm and a leg were exposed to his captors and headed his mustang for the ranchhouse.

But the outlaws, divining his purpose, spurred their horses to intercept him; and Gar felt his hopes sink, for it was almost impossible to run the gauntlet of the three men without one of them spinning him from the saddle.

The nearest man was Ed, and Gar could see the anger in his face as he pounded nearer, six-gun at the ready. Swinging back into the saddle, Gar tried to outrun the outlaw but realized that if he did so the others would have him trapped among themselves. His only hope lay in pursuing a straight line to the ranch.

A snarl of triumph twisted Ed's face as his angle of travel brought him closer to Gar. The outlaw aimed his revolver for the moment he would be abreast of the trouble-shooter. But at the last moment Gar hauled back on his reins and the mustang reared. A bullet burned across the horse's nose and Ed hurtled by, attempting vainly to wheel his mount as he saw that he had missed.

Gar spurred forward as he watched the second outlaw slow his horse to wait for the trouble-shooter. This man was nearer Gar's line of flight and had but to watch the trouble-shooter come toward him. Six-gun aimed, he waited. But Gar had mothing to lose; he pointed his horse to run into the outlaw's mustang broadside and urged the animal into a faster gallop.

Too late the outlaw saw what Gar was going to do. Dropping his weapon, he pulled at his reins trying to turn his horse and avoid a collision. He managed to pull the nose of the animal around just as Gar rode by him.

But now the last outlaw was spur-

ring grimly toward him. Turning his horse slightly, Gar tried to outrun his enemy but saw that it wouldn't be possible. Riding his angle, the man would be beside him long before he reached the ranchhouse.

Bending low in the saddle, Gar tried to urge every iota of speed from his mustang. And the animal responded. But just behind him, drawing closer, drummed the grim form of the last outlaw.

Looking back, Gar saw the man aiming his six-gun. Desperately, the trouble-shooter pulled the knot on his slicker roll fastened behind his cantle. The wind of his passing caught the slicker and mushroomed it into a sail. Frightened, the outlaw's horse began to buck.

Glancing over his shoulder, Gar saw that he had outrun his pursuit. He pulled his mustang to a stop before the ranchhouse and leaped from the saddle. He raced for the building, burst through the door, and fell breathless to the floor.

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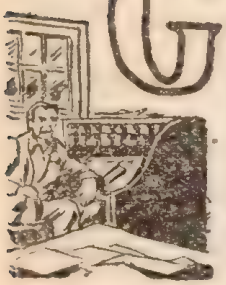

GAR LAY where he had fallen for several moments, hardly daring to believe his good luck. Then he turned over and sat up. Two men were crouching behind windows, smoking guns in their hands, waiting for the next move of the raiders. The girl lay on the floor between them, a pile of cartridges beside her, hurriedly loading several extra guns.

Bea scowled at him over her work. "You put on a nice show out there," she said. "But we know it's some trick!"

Gar flushed. He was surprised to discover how pleased he was to see the girl again. But her words and obvious distrust hurt him more than he cared to admit. "Look! I haven't any guns," he said gruffly, indicating his empty holsters.

Bea sniffed skeptically. "A man of your calibre doesn't need any guns. He can do as much damage with a knife or a club!"

Gar became a little angry. "You little hellcat!" he snapped. "What do I have to do to prove I'm on the level? Run out there and let Hastings kill me?"

"Even then I'd suspect a trick!" was the retort.

At a loss for words, Gar could just glare at her. One of the men defending the house turned from his window. He was a lean man with silvered temples and black hair beginning to grizzle.

"Daddy," Bea said, "this is the man I was telling you about. The trouble-shooter from Great Western."

The rancher studied Gar briefly. "What do you want?" he asked in a hostile voice.

They had no love for Great Western. That much was obvious. But judging by what he had seen, experienced, and deduced, Gar didn't know as he could blame them. "I'd like to help," he said.

"Then go back out with your friends!" Miller snarled.

"They're not my friends." Briefly, Gar recounted his experiences since he left Bea that afternoon.

"You expect me to believe that story?" the rancher asked.

"Believe what you like," Gar retorted. "But that's the truth. You saw me fight my way through three of them to get here, and you can see the marks of the rope on my wrists." He held up his wrists so they could see them.

Bea looked at the cruel marks left by the bonds and for a moment he saw the concern in her blue eyes. But the next moment the same look of distrust was back on her face. "I don't believe it!" she said.

"Look!" Gar said. "Great Western

gives its managers orders to live as peacefully as possible with their neighbors; we don't want any range wars or disputes running up our costs. I was sent here because Hastings' expenses were way out of line with the scope of his operations.

"Hastings knew," he continued, "that as soon as I got a look at the books and talked to some of the basin men it wouldn't take me long to figure out what he was doing. He had to get me out of the way. So he ordered his men to take me off the stage. That was the time you, Bea, saved my hide.

"That failed. But he still had to get rid of me and fast. So he led me into a trap. Then he figured that as long as he had to kill me he might as well profit by my death. He planned this raid with the idea of leaving my body for you to find and so figure that Great Western was behind all this trouble."

Gar watched them consider his words. After a time, Miller said, "But what's Hastings want to get from all this?"

"I don't know," Gar said, "but I've got it figured out this way: Hastings is power-hungry, and so ambitious he'll stop at nothing to achieve his ends. Accordingly, he has raided the small ranches and tried to make it look like Great Western wants their spreads. The small ranches know they can't fight Great Western and they'll get discouraged and leave the basin. Others are afraid to buy themselves a peck of trouble by purchasing the outfits so the value of the spreads drops to nothing. Then Hastings can step in and buy them. When he has enough small ranches to make a good sized spread the chances are he'll try to work some scheme on Great Western to get Anvil. If that succeeds he'll own the whole basin."

THE SECOND defender, a white-haired man, spoke without looking around. "There's a rumor in Saguache that Hastings bought the ranches of those two men who quit the basin last month."

Miller considered. "Supposing this is all true. What can we do about it?"

"First off," Gar said, "give me some guns and let me help you stand them off."

"All right, Bea," the father said.

The girl started to protest, thought better of it and sullenly threw two pistols to Gar. He smiled at her, checked the cylinders and crawled to an unprotected window. He broke the glass with his pistol and looked out.

The glow from the fires cast a huge circle of light. He had a good view of the surrounding area and he looked for Hastings and his men. But the attackers were not in sight.

"Have they given up for the night?" he asked.

"I don't know," the old puncher answered. "But we better not take any chances and wait them out."

Gar made himself as comfortable as possible on the floor and kept his eyes carefully sweeping his view. The other men did the same while the girl, the guns loaded, sat watching Gar.

Her scrutiny made him nervous and he wished someone would start a conversation. But he knew that his unfamiliar presence in their midst would discourage intercourse because to them he was still an unknown quantity. They wanted to believe in him and trust him, and yet frontier habit made them cautious.

The silence inside and outside the house tightened his nerves with an ominous promise. He glanced at the others and wondered if they felt it, too; their small nervous movements gave him an affirmative answer.

Suddenly a fusillade of shots and a thundering of hooves startled him. At the border of light cast by the flames he discerned movement. Four horsemen came charging at the house!

Gar watched the progress of the raid-

ers and knew this was no sham attack. This time the outlaws were in earnest. Beside him Miller and his puncher began returning the fire. But their defense was inaccurate and ineffective; they were not used to firearms and were no match against Hastings and his men.

As the outlaws drummed closer, Gar rested the barrel of his revolver on the window sill and took careful aim. He squeezed the trigger and the lead outlaw spilled from the saddle and lay still.

The unexpectedness of the hit broke the attack. The others split and began riding in circles after they had retreated beyond pistol range. They stayed at this distance, drawing the fire of the defenders and throwing careless shots at the house.

Some sense sent a warning through Gar's mind. There were only two horsemen out there now and there should be three! Where was the last outlaw?

He leaped back from the window. "I'm going to scout the rest of the house!" he said.

They started to protest, but Gar gave them no chance. Bending at the waist, he moved swiftly into the next room. Stopping at the window, he flattened himself against the wall and peered out. But no movement met his searching eye.

HE WENT on to the next room and repeated his action. Again he met with no success. He went from room to room searching for some sign of a sneak attempt from the rear. He was about to think he had calculated wrong when a movement by a nearby shed caught his eye.

He remained against the wall, watching the shed. Soon the gunman, Ed, ran from the cover of the shed and dropped behind a rain barrel. Gar made no move. Then Ed rose from his cover and made for the very window at which Gar stood. Gun in hand he stopped suddenly and crouched, peering inside.

Had he seen Gar? From this corner, the flames cast their light through two windows illuminating the room while the outside was in darkness. The trouble-shooter stood as still as a statue. He knew that if Ed had seen him, he would never have a chance for a return shot.

For what seemed an eternity, Ed stared at Gar, then he holstered his weapon and tested the window. The sash slid noiselessly upward and the gunman climbed quickly inside. Gar waited until he had both feet on the floor, then he stepped forward and drove a fist at Ed's head.

As luck would have it, the gunman had started to move and the blow grazed him. Surprised, he leaped to one side, his hands dropping to his six-guns.

Gar leaped at him before Ed could free the guns from leather. He took the gunman about the waist and dumped him to the floor, landing atop him. But a sharp blow to the chin stunned Gar and a knee in his groin sent a wave of pain through his body. He grabbed Ed in a bear hug, knowing he had to keep him from freeing his weapons.

Across the floor they rolled, each man trying desperately to get the advantage. The pain in his groin subsided somewhat and Gar twisted free. Ed's hands swept toward his guns instantly and Gar smashed a blow to his face.

Ed's head went back against the floor, and, stunned, he lay still for a moment. Gar looped another fist at him and felt the gunman's body relax into unconsciousness.

Gar sat up until he got his wind. Then he got to his feet and threw Ed over his shoulder. He carried him into the room where Bea, her father, and the puncher were and threw him onto the floor. "Look what I found trying to sneak up on us."

Ed started to stir and Gar hit him again.

Miller glanced over his shoulder. "I'll be damned! Bea, honey, get some rope from the next room and we'll tie him up."

THE GIRL returned with the rope in a moment and Gar proceeded to tie Ed while the girl watched. There was a new expression on her face, and Gar, knowing she believed in him now, was too shy to look at her.

When he had finished, he went back to his window. Hastings and his remaining men were drawing back into the darkness and he settled down to wait for their next move.

As he watched, he would glance from the corner of his eye at the others. They, too, sat silently waiting. By now, he thought, if Hastings' original plan had worked, the raid would be over and these people would be out of danger. But because Gar was still alive, Hastings would attack again until he had made sure of the trouble-shooter.

Hastings could not afford to let Gar live for the trouble-shooter spelled disaster for him. The Anvil manager had no choice. And the whole thing boiled down to a fight between Gar and Hastings.

The trouble-shooter glanced at the girl. He had no right to endanger her life and that of her father and the puncher by dragging them into his fight. He had it in his power to remove these people from danger and he had to do so. And as a clinching argument he thought, I am armed now.

He stood up. "I'm going out," he said.

Silence greeted his words as their heads swiveled to regard him. Then Bea shrieked, "No! I won't let you!"

Surprised and pleased, Gar stared at her. "I've got to go," he said to her, trying to make her understand.

"She's right," Miller said. *"We* won't let you!"

Emotion swelled Gar's throat, but his duty lay clear before him. He swung his gun to cover the three of them. "I'm going!" he said. "If anyone tries to stop me, I'll shoot!"

They sat staring at him in silence. Then Bea scrambled to her feet and, disregarding his revolver, ran toward him. "You're not going!"

Gar knew that if once she got her arms around him she would not let him out. And he knew that he would never have any respect for himself if he allowed her to stop him.

As she neared him, Gar cursed himself and swung a fist to her unsuspecting chin. She gave a moan and sank unconscious to the floor. "Tell her I'm sorry," he said. He moved to the door, opened it, and stepped outside.

THE HORSE Gar had rented had run off, probably back to the livery stable. The trouble-shooter took a coil of rope from a bench and moved to the corral. The horses were in a nervous, milling group as far away from the fire as the confines of the corral permitted. Gar lassoed one and saddled him. Then, swinging astride, he rode at a walk away from the ranch.

He wanted to give Hastings and his men plenty of time to see him coming and recognize him. He wanted to interrupt any more plans which would inflict more damage on the ranch of Miller or to the rancher, his daughter, or the puncher. If they got him, he could see no reason why they wouldn't be satisfied and ride off.

The gunman, Ed, was not a basin man but an owlhooter Hastings had imported to help in his schemes. Hastings would assume Ed dead when he didn't come back and since his body could not furnish direct evidence to tie Anvil into the raid, the manager would dismiss him from consideration.

The light from the flames began to retreat from the night as the fires began to die and the circle of visibility

grew smaller. Gar could not see into the darkness beyond the light, but he knew before he had gone very far that Hastings and his men could not but help see him.

He half-expected to feel the smash of bullets as he rode, but he drew away from the ranch and no shot was fired at him. He realized that Hastings was waiting until he got closer and made a clearer target before the Anvil manager gave the order to shoot.

He was nearing the perimeter of darkness when the voice stopped him. "That's far enough!"

Gar halted his mount. He peered into the night and reluctantly gave Hastings credit for his cunning. The manager had chosen his ground wisely. Gar was in plain view to him but strain his eyes as he might the trouble-shooter could only make out vague dim shapes in the darkness where Hastings and his men waited.

Gar sat, making no move. There was a long silence. Finally Hastings' voice came, faintly curious, from the darkness. "You come to talk?"

The trouble-shooter shook his head. "There's a woman in that house; I left to remove her life from danger."

"So you came out to sacrifice your life in order to save Bea's! All right, hero, here's your bullet!"

But Gar was determined to die fighting. As the manager's gun roared, he bent low over his horse and spurred for the cover of darkness. The mustang faltered as the slug struck him, but he continued running. More guns roared as the other outlaws began firing. Bullets sang by Gar's ears and sank into the horse. The animal suddenly went down, throwing the trouble-shooter clear. But the unexpected move had caught the outlaws by surprise long enough for Gar to reach darkness.

THE TROUBLE-SHOOTER scrambled to his feet, raced several yards, and hit the ground again. An angry fusillade of gunshots greeted his move. Bullets whined through the night, probing for him. Hastings hurriedly gave orders to surround the immediate area.

Gar lay as still as stone until his eyes had adjusted themselves to the blackness. Looking about, he could make out the dim forms of the outlaws as they formed a triangle around him.

Slowly he began to inch forward, seeking cover of some sort behind which he could make a stand. He had to be very careful, for any sudden noise, the breaking of a twig or the click of two rocks, could give him away. The outlaws had dismounted now and were watching and listening in an attempt to locate him.

The ground was a maze of small brush and rocks. He could find no cover and his search became more desperate. Then he blundered into a shallow depression. He flattened himself in the hole and waited for the next move of the outlaws.

"Dude!" Hastings called to one of his men. "Take your horse and sweep an area about one hundred feet wide between us and the fire."

Gar's heart sank as he watched Dude. The man nearest the ranch leaped atop his mustang and cantered to the border of light. Then riding back and forth, he began to inexorably work his way toward Gar.

The scheme could not fail. The outlaws knew the general area in which Gar was hiding, and while two of them watched to make sure the trouble-shooter didn't escape the third man riding his pattern would flush him.

Gar watched as Dude worked his

way closer and closer. He worked his way to the edge of the depression where a fringe of brush helped hide him and waited.

Dude made a pass just at the edge of the hole and Gar knew that his next sweep would discover him. He watched the outlaw turn his mustang and come pounding back toward him. Nearer came the horse, and just before the animal reached the hole Gar threw himself to one side placing the mustang between himself and the other two outlaws.

Dude cursed and, gun at the ready, fired. The bullet, hastily aimed, dug up dirt between Gar's legs. The trouble-shooter twisted and triggered his own gun. Dude threw up his arms and toppled from the horse.

Shouting, the other two outlaws spurred toward him. Gar scuttled several feet away and waited. As the mustangs came nearer, the trouble-shooter aimed and fired again.

Hastings clutched his middle and his mount plunged to a stop. Weakly, the manager fought to bring up his gun. Gar triggered and Hastings fell from the saddle.

The trouble-shooter whirled for the third outlaw, but too late! Something struck his six-gun and sent it spinning from his grasp with the force of a sledge hammer. He stared at his numb hand as the owlhooter George halted his mount.

"Stand up and take it in the belly!" There was a grin of anticipation on the outlaw's face. His revolver glinted in the dying flames of the fire.

Slowly, Gar climbed to his feet. This was the end of the trail. Emotionless, he faced the gunman.

The grin widened as George's finger tightened on the trigger. There was a shot. The outlaw's face registered surprise. He straightened in the saddle and the gun fell from his hand. He slid from the horse like a sack of grain.

Unable to believe his eyes, Gar swung about. Bea Miller stood several feet away, a smoking rifle in her hands.

"What are *you* doing here?" he gasped.

GAR HAD sent in his report and Shaughnessy had come to Anvil with a new manager. The trouble-shooter was ready to leave on a new assignment but, strangely, he felt a reluctance to do so.

He paced the floor of the ranch kitchen while the supervisor and the new manager talked. The girl, Bea, was on his mind. He couldn't stop thinking about her. He had to see her to say goodbye before he left, so he saddled a horse and started for the Miller spread.

It was curious that she should haunt him this way. He almost felt like marrying the girl. His mind rebelled at the thought of marriage, but after thinking about it the idea fascinated him.

He remembered all his old resolves. He was going to reach the top of the success ladder and no girl was going to tie him down and hold him back. But Bea wasn't that kind of a girl. She would be an asset to him and an aid in his climb. Her going out into the night and saving his life proved that.

By the time he reached the Miller spread, he had convinced himself that marriage would be a wise move. He dismounted and Bea came from the kitchen and waved to him.

He went toward her. "Bea!" he blurted clumsily. "Will you marry me?"

Though she must have been anticipating the proposal and already made up her mind as to the answer, she hesitated as though she were surprised.

He waited in an agony of suspense. He cursed her to himself for torturing him so. Then he didn't care for she was nodding her head and then she was in his arms.

After a while he looked down at her and said, "I've got to see Shaughnessy, honey; he promised me a ranch."

SPECIAL FEATURE by JAMES HINES

BUTTE, MONTANA-- A COPPER CAMP

TWO COPPER miners on their way to work one morning about daybreak paused on the Anaconda Road overlooking the fabulous city of Butte, Montana, and one miner remarked: "Looky at 'er, Joe. She's as ugly as hell now, jest comin' to life. Looks like some ole painted hag that's been up all night."

"Yep," Joe said, looking down upon the sprawling town. "Butte's as ugly as sin all right, but she's shore got a big heart!"

Yes, as the miners put it, Butte, Montana—the greatest copper mining town in the world—is ugly on the surface, but underneath that surface there is beauty unsurpassed: big-hearted; spirited, and the people are unequaled as neighbors. Here you are likely to find a United States Senator strolling down the street, his arm linked with some bum, looking for a handout. The caste system is not known in Butte. One person is considered just as good as another. The girl from the red-light is considered just as good as the lady from the best residential section. The miner does not look up to the banker, and the banker does not look down on the miner.

Butte, Montana! It has had many a hectic day. It has always been an exciting town. Basically, it is a huge mining camp on the richest hill in the world. One-third of all the copper mined in the United States comes from Butte!

The first white men known to have visited Butte are Judge C. E. Irvine and a party from Walla Walla, Washington Territory, in 1856.

They found an ancient hole, several feet deep, which became known as the Original Lode. Scattered around the edge of this hole were elk horns, which

had been sharpened on the ends and looked as if they had been used as picks in searching for metal. Whether a white man had been here before is not known. Some people believe that the elk horns belonged to the Indians.

The discovery of gold was made by William Allison and G. O. Humphrey, on Butte Hill, in July, 1864. The famous placer-mining camps of Virginia City and Bannack were reaching their peaks at this time, all within several hundred miles of Butte.

Humphrey and Allison worked the dry gulches by hauling the gold bearing dirt down to Silver Bow Creek and washing it.

The news of the gold strike spread like wildfire to the other camps, and miners poured in by the hundreds. Even miners from the Alder Gulch diggings came over and helped pan the gulches.

Several camps sprang up almost overnight: Silver Bow—named for Silver Bow Creek, Rocker, and Butte City. The gulches around these towns echoed with the scrape of the miners' tools, the swish of gravel in the pans, and the creaking of the crude handmade rockers. Often gun-shots were heard up and down the gulches.

The miners lived in crude tents and shanties, anything that they could throw together. Labor began with the first streak of dawn over the jagged outlines of the Continental Divide. The men worked six days a week; but on the seventh they usually hit one of the little towns in the gulches and raised different kinds of hell, spending their hard-earned week's wages. These towns consisted mostly of saloons, and no man was safe without a brace of revolvers in his belt and a bowie-knife tucked in his bootleg.

BY 1874, the placer diggings had petered out and the populations of the camps were only small handfuls compared to what they had been. Silver Bow was a ghost town, Rocker City was crumbling to decay and ruin, and Butte had a population of only about sixty people. Almost everyone thought the towns had gone.

But Butte was brought to life once more, pulsating, rip-roaring, more powerful than before, by a young Irish immigrant named Marcus Daly. Daly had come from Ireland when he was fifteen, without a red cent, and had learned mining the hard way in the California and Nevada mining camps. He had gained the backing of several Salt Lake bankers when he appeared in Butte as the manager of the Alice Silver Mine. He was very ambitious and was always on the lookout for new ventures. He became a partner with Michael Hickey. Hickey, an ex-soldier of the Union Army, had located a copper lead in 1882 on his location and had named it the Anaconda, which in due time became the largest copper mining, smelting, and fabricating organization in the world.

Presently, Daly, ever-ambitious, purchased the Anaconda Copper Mining Company from Hickey. Then the young Irish immigrant set to work exploring, pushing developements fast and far. At a three hundred foot level, good luck struck. Instead of finding silver, he found copper! This was 1882, a great year in mining history. This discovery of copper resulted in making Butte the greatest mining camp on earth!

Three billion dollars in mineral wealth came from Butte in three quarters of a century. It is unbelievable that this town on the gray slopes of the Continental Divide, a mile above sea level in southwestern Montana, could produce such metal. No, Butte was not dead, as thought by many. No. Butte was just starting to live!

News of the copper strike reached out and miners poured in. Some even brought their families when they found out the truth of the strike. Butte prospered. Additional and larger mills and smelters were constructed on all sides,

and the development of the mines expanded. Expert mining men from all over the world, attracted by Butte's favorable report, traveled there. The stage was set and the curtain pulled back for the greatest mining boom in history. One of the greatest booms the world has ever known.

By, 1884, three hundred mines were in operation and more than four thousand claims were posted on the hills around the copper camp. The yield of silver and copper for that year was estimated by experts at $14,000,000. By the end of 1900, almost a quarter of the world's copper supply and seventy-two million fine ounces of gold and silver were being produced annually.

The adventurous miners lived a hard, rugged life. Drinking and fighting, the majority of them spent their money as fast as they made it. "The hell with saving it!" one miner said. "When it's gone, there's always more on the Hill!"

BUTTE was a fabulous town all right. It boasted of saloons such as *The Beer Can, Bucket of Blood, The Water-Hole, Open-All-Night, Big Stope, Collar and Elbow, Graveyard, Saturday Night, They Are All Here, The Alley Cat, The Cesspool, Pay Day,* and suburbs of the town were named Dogtown, Chicken Flats, Butcher Hill, Seldom Seen, Hungry Hill.

One saloon owner filled his bar bottles from one big liquor barrel and named then "Coming Off Shift Special," "Good Night Special," "All Day Special," and set aside some specially decorated bottles with liquor from the same barrel, entitled: "For wakes, weddin's, births and holidays."

"Order in this court!" Justice was dealt out first one way, then another. A judge fined one of the members of the bar for contempt of court, the lawyer having been pleading his case in a loud voice, which had awakened the judge from his afternoon nap. In this town one judge declared firmly that a

miner was allowed to get drunk once a week and beat up his wife once a month. But for any more than that he would be thrown into jail.

Place: Butte; Year: 1866; Scene: the notorious *Clipper Shades* dive, deep in the red-light district; Event: the first public barroom wedding took place, the marriage of Mollie De Murska, a woman of the red-light, and Jack Jolly, the town marshal.

Dominic Foresco, an Italian, once advertised in one of the daily papers that he was in the market for a wife and that he would stand at the main intersection of the city, the corner of Park and Main Streets, for three hours each day wearing a white carnation on his coat lapel. The Italian was jailed for stopping the traffic, and a score of prospective brides stormed the jail, but only after word had leaked out that Foresco was worth twenty thousand dollars in government bonds.

A hellfire and brimstone preacher descended on Butte, setting up a huge tent and warning the people to repent of their sins or be burned in a lake of fire and brimstone. A saloon was near the tent. The ambitious saloonkeeper had large painted banners erected and

placed outside his saloon so the departing worshipers could not fail to see them, advertising that scoops of cold beer could be had at his place for five cents a-piece and that extra bartenders were put on during revival week.

The old *Atlanta Bar* in Butte was the longest bar in the world, a full block in length. It boasted that it had as many as fifteen bartenders always serving its customers and that twelve thousand beers were sold there on a Saturday night. Then there was the *Success Cafe*—so small that it was crowded with four customers.

Once a bum fell to the saloon floor, faint from hunger, after scores of big-hearted citizens had offered to buy him drinks, but not a single one a meal.

On many summer afternoons, during the old days, the girls from the red-light district could be seen cantering through the downtown business district on blooded saddle horses and wearing the latest riding fashions.

At the turn of the century, Butte advertised that its copper mines had yielded almost two billion dollars and that it was the only western city the boothill of which had more dead than there were people living in the city.

Yes, Butte, Montana, ugly as sin, but big-hearted, has been and still is an exciting town. She is the largest town in Montana, on the west slope of the Continental Divide, at an elevation of 5,755 feet. Butte is the county seat of Silver county. She is located on two Federal highways and is served by four transcontinental railroads and a fine airport. Formerly fumes from the smelters killed all vegetation and the general appearance of the city was desolate indeed by day, though at night it was a beauty. Today most of the ore is treated in Anaconda and Great Falls or someplace else away from the city. The grass has reappeared and beautiful residential districts and parks have been developed. Butte is the principal railroad and business center of the Rocky Mountain northwest, the largest city between Minneapolis and Spokane north of Salt Lake. To the west of the city is Big Butte, a sharp conical peak from which the city derives its name. Yes, Butte has built a great reputation, a remarkable reputation that is known where adventurous men gather and talk.

Because a girl loved him, and was proud of him, there was no peace for ★

THE CALEXICO KID

Gunswift Novel by Lauran Paine

Fragments of torn-apart pine boxes told this Wells-Fargo Agent a story of ★

GOLD AND GUNSMOKE

Thrilling Novelet by Gordon D. Shirreffs

These are but two of the

15 Complete Action-Packed Stories

in the big April issue of

REAL WESTERN STORIES

If ever an accused man looked innocent, this Meetin'-house Joyner did. And Judge Steele wished that that pesty lawyer, French Demeree, were here to defend him. Because Prosecutor Wade Claybrook seemed to be doing his duty with too danged much of a will.

FINGER OF THE BEAST

JUDGE STEELE STORY

by Lon Williams

JUDGE WARDLOW STEELE took one stern, discerning glance at Flat Creek's seething courtroom crowd. Immediately he sensed that something was amiss. When there was reasonable certainty of a just hanging, men's faces showed eagerness, excitement, even pleasurable anticipation. When their expressions were glum, worried and restive, belief that a mistake had been made was as evident as if written in an open book.

Judge Steele tugged at his straw-colored mustache. When an innocent man was brought to trial for murder, only one conclusion could be drawn—namely, that he had been framed by some scoundrel lower than a snake. Possibility of such present villainy filled Steele with fury.

He jerked his head vehemently. "Sheriff, call court."

Sheriff Jerd Buckalew, tall, raw-boned and poker-faced, rose and hammered with his forty-five. "Flat Creek's criminal court is now in session; keep that in mind while you've got a mind to keep it in."

Heavily-armed deputies nodded and hitched up their gunbelts. Somber-eyed Vigies here and there looked on in quiet readiness to lend a hand, if needed.

Steele glanced at Clerk James Skiffington. "Skiffy, call fust case."

The witnesses gazed in terrified consternation as Dan Trowhitt came in behind the determined-looking bloodhound, followed by a triumphant French Demeree.

Skiffington arose, slim, tall and spectral, and shouted harshly, "People *versus* House, alias Meetin'-house, Joyner. Charge, first-degree murder."

Steele looked down at a puncheon bench reserved for men who'd come hither to collect their wages of sin. He discovered instantly convincing cause for congregational uneasiness. A young man sat there, quiet, worried, but in texture a person of breeding and quality. Here was no murderer, else looks deceived; yet a Flat Creek citizen had been killed and, by thunder, somebody would have to pay for it.

Tense and angry, Steele growled, "Murder, eh? Be-consarned if it ain't time these carnivorous catamounts learned murder don't pay. You got a lawyer?"

A round-faced, middle-sized, immaculately-dressed gentleman with gray hair, stubby mustache and haughty blue eyes got up beside Meetin'-house Joyner. "I am his lawyer, suh. Professor Lexicon Hutto."

Now where in tarnation was Flat Creek's notorious defense lawyer, Demeree from Tennessee? "Consarn you, Hutto, you ain't tryin' to scrounge French Demeree off his roostin' place, are you?"

"I am not, suh," replied Hutto. "Mr. Demeree, with whom I am associated in this case, has business elsewhere momentarily; I trust he will arrive before it is forever too late."

"See hyar, Hutto," Steele growled angrily, "you ain't insinuatin' that this varmint's guilty, are you?"

Hutto coughed shortly. "Well, suh, Your Honor, I wish I could feel that his being innocent would turn out to be of some consequence."

Steele stiffened. Be-consarned if he'd ever learn to let these lawyers alone! They always tied him in a knot. He swung left. "Whar's our man?"

A stocky redhead, intellectual and honorable in appearance and demeanor, rose quietly. "Wade Claybrook, Your Honor. Prosecuting attorney."

Steele eyed him doubtfully for seconds, saw him as a man of variable judgment and fighting spirit. "Claybrook," Steele gibed, "you look mighty noble; are you fixin' to admit you've made a mistake in having this young house-dog indicted?"

"Your Honor," replied Claybrook forcefully, "what our grand jury has done I do not question. It is my duty to prosecute; that I shall do. Our grand jury, by indicting this defendant, has declared there is sufficient evidence against him to justify bringing him to trial for murder. A trial he shall have."

Steele grunted and snarled. "Claybrook, thar's just one trouble with your ambition; it's most determined when it's least needed. If you can prove this boy guilty, go to it, but don't count on no help from me."

Claybrook stood his ground. "Neither side should count on help from Your Honor; a judge should be an umpire, not a partisan."

Steele's nostrils dilated with anger. "Consarn you, Claybrook, any time our side is wrong, you can count on me to say so." He glared down at Meetin'-house Joyner. "All right, you son of adversity, what's your plea?"

PROFESSOR HUTTO got up. "Defendant pleads not guilty, Your Honor."

"Think you can make twelve jurors believe he ain't guilty?"

"Suh," Hutto replied pompously, "justice is a blindfolded goddess. She hears not only all that we mortals hear, but also voices from infinity which are too sublime for our materialistic ears. That which men depose is blended with whisperings of conscience and mercy and distilled as unblemished truth into jurors' souls. If my client is innocent, to those men who shall sit in judgment his innocence will in due time be revealed. I trust Your Honor's question has been answered."

"By thunder, Hutto, my question could've been answered 'yes' or 'no'. Panel a jury, Bucky."

With jury empaneled and witnesses sworn, Claybrook stood. "Call Boaz Welfare, coroner of Flat Creek, as first witness."

Welfare was brought in and seated. He was stout, sandy-haired, round-faced and arrogant.

Claybrook eyed him with cold courtesy. "You are Boaz Welfare?"

Welfare looked down his nose at Claybrook. "I am Boaz Welfare, coroner of Flat Creek. Last Tuesday morning I was called upon to examine a body supposedly killed under mysterious and suspicious circumstances. Thereafter—"

Hutto arose leisurely. "Your Honor, suh, this distinguished gentleman was not called upon to make a speech. I suggest he answer 'yes' or 'no', except where other answer is clearly indicated."

Steele suppressed an urge to tell Hutto to practice what he preached. "This trial could be done and over with in no time, Hutto, if it warn't for lawyers. As it is, you and Claybrook will make a job of it; go ahead, Mr. Prosecutor."

Claybrook stared at Welfare with disapproval. "You are sometimes called General Welfare, aren't you?"

"I regard that as neither here nor there, sir."

"Your answers to questions certainly have a tendency to be general."

"My time is valuable, sir. If there is

something you wish to know, you have to indicate as much and I shall tell you, and not by jumps and starts either."

Steele eyed Claybrook's witness angrily. "See hyar, General; one more exhitibion of disrespect like that, and I'll fine you for contempt of court."

Welfare pinked, angry and chagrinned. "Yes, Your Honor."

Claybrook said coldly, "Did you identify this body you were called upon to examine?"

"Yes."

"Was it Shovel-nose Gaffner?"

"Yes."

"Did you ascertain if death had been caused by external violence?"

"Yes."

"Did you ascertain by what sort of instrument death was caused?"

"Yes."

"Was it an axe?"

"Yes."

"Where was this body located?"

"Yes."

"Do you refuse to answer?"

"No."

"Then answer."

"Yes."

STEELE'S face grew hard. "Consarn you, Welfare, you know how to answer a question. I fine you ten dollars for contempt of court. Bucky, you see it's paid, or let him rot it out in jail."

Rough faces broke into smiles. General Welfare looked furious, but beat.

Claybrook glared at him through pink eyebrows. "Where did you find Shovel-nose Gaffner's body?"

"In his shack in Sarlay Gulch."

"Relate what you did upon finding this body?"

Welfare sulked, then thought better of his situation. "I summoned a coroner's jury, as was my duty. This jury with my help and guidance conducted an inquest; we held that Gaffner had been murdered, motive being robbery."

Claybrook sat down. "No more questions."

Professor Hutto got up. "Your Honor, suh, I should like to cross-examine this witness."

Steele sniffed. "I supposed you would. But proceed."

Hutto squared himself at Welfare. "I gather from your testimony that Shovel-nose Gaffner was murdered with an axe. Why did you reach that conclusion?"

Welfare looked down his nose at Hutto. "Why?"

"Suh, what circumstances led you to believe Gaffner had been murdered with an axe?"

"His head had been pounded into pulp, sir, and a bloody axe lay beside his dead body."

"That is all, suh." Hutto turned to Judge Steele. "If Mr. Claybrook has no objection, Your Honor, defendant consents that Mr. Welfare may occupy a seat in this court room."

"No objection," said Claybrook, though puzzled.

There was an unoccupied puncheon inside that sanctum where only lawyers, defendants and court officials customarily were allowed. General Welfare was directed to sit there. Steele was curious as to why Hutto had made this suggestion; but he regarded it as a chance to learn something, hence permitted it.

Claybrook nodded to a deputy-sheriff. "Next witness, Clawson Wilde."

WILDE WAS brought in. He was a medium-sized blond with pudgy face, small blue-green eyes, and vain, self-confident bearing.

"Your name?" asked Claybrook.

In a blustery manner, Wilde answered, "Clawson Wilde."

"Were you acquainted with deceased, Shovel-nose Gaffner?"

"I sure was; Gaffner was one of my best friends."

Hutto popped up. "Your Honor, defendant thinks that statement should be explained. How many 'best friends' does this witness have, Your Honor?"

"See hyar, Hutto, what do you mean by raising such trivial objection as that?" Steele demanded.

"Your Honor, suh, this witness would have our jurors believe he is a man with many friends. In my opinion, judging from his looks, his only friends are night-prowlers, such as coyotes and rats."

"I object to that," stormed Claybrook. "If Mr. Hutto means to impeach this witness, he should wait until cross-examination."

"I apologize to Mr. Claybrook, Your Honor; but I must say that waiting will be an ordeal."

Steele tugged at his mustache. "Claybrook if I could feel that you was on our side, I'd be proud of this fighting spirit you're showing hyar. But proceed."

Claybrook eyed his witness. "Are you also acquainted with defendant Joyner?"

"Indeed, sir. Until he turned out to be a murderer, I—"

"Object," shouted Hutto.

"I object, too," said Claybrook.

"So do I, by thunder," growled Steele. "You answer what's put to you or, be-consarned, I'll have you jailed."

Wilde lost some of his self-confidence; his look became shifty.

Claybrook asked, "Was defendant Joyner acquainted with deceased Gaffner?"

Wilde put on a bold front. "I'm afraid he was, sir; too well acquainted, in fact."

"Why do you say that?"

"Because they worked adjoining claims. They also had a falling out. Gaffner accused Joyner of claim-raiding at night and threatened him with a lynching. Joyner got mad, said he'd—"

"Object," Hutto shouted. "He can't

Claybrook drew in his chin. "Your Honor, there are exceptions to Mr. Hutto's hearsay evidence rule. What an *accused* person said may be pretell what somebody said."

sented as showing murderous intent. This is in accordance with our ancient maxim, *actus non facit reum, nisi mens sit rea,* which means that an act does not make a man guilty, unless he be so in intention. Conversely, if an accused kills with intent to commit murder, it *is* murder."

"Hutto's overruled. Proceed, Mr. Claybrook."

"What did defendant say?" Claybrook asked.

Witness Wilde answered with a knowing look. "Joyner says to me, says he, 'Nobody can accuse me of stealing and live. Shovel-nose or me is going to die, and I ain't meanin' me.' I begged him not to hurt poor old Gaffner, but he says to me, he says, 'Wilde, your begging for Shovel-nose won't do no good. Me and Shovel-nose can't both live.'"

Claybrook sat down. "No more questions."

Hutto got up.

"All right, Hutto. Looks like you've got an uphill job hyar, but you can try."

HUTTO CAME round and faced Wilde. "Your name is Clawson Wilde, is it?"

"Sure."

"Sometimes called Hog Wilde?"

"No."

"Do you know what is meant by perjury?"

"Sure I know."

"Then would you still say you're never called Hog Wilde, if I told you I could produce scores of witnesses here who'd swear you are called Hog Wilde?"

Wilde squirmed. "I guess you're right. Maybe sometimes I *am* called Hog Wilde—but not to my face; you can bet."

"Are you sure it's never to your face?"

"Well, maybe a few times, but what of it?"

"Another question, suh; have you ever been convicted of a crime?"

Claybrook rose indignantly. "Now, I object to that. Cross-examination should cross. No questions were asked on direct examination as to this man's character or reputation."

Steele lost patience with Claybrook. "Now see hyar, Claybrook. This two-legged polecat has just proved hisself a liar. If he's been a jailbird, too, by thunder, let it be shown. Hog Wilde, answer that question."

Wilde twisted, flushed. "Well, I wasn't guilty; I reckon a man can sometimes be put in prison by mistake."

Hutto returned to his table. "Your Honor, suh, *quod est criminis loquitur perpetuam memoriam ipso*, which is to say, that which is criminal speaks as a perpetual memorial to itself. Again, *falsus in uno, falsus in omnibus*, meaning, false in one thing, false in all. By those maxims, this witness is not entitled to be believed in anything he has said. I have no more questions and, if there's no objection, I'd suggest he sit there by Mr. Welfare."

Claybrook looked stumped, but shook his head. "No objection."

Steele was more curious than ever. What in tarnation did this Hutto have up his sleeve? "See hyar, Hutto, if I didn't have a suspicion you're on our side, I'd send that lyin' stinker off to jail."

"Your Honor, suh, as to my being on your side, I am convinced that we are both sincerely allied with justice; hence, as devotees of a common divinity we, indeed, march together."

Steele grunted in disgust. "Claybrook, call next witness."

Claybrook nodded. "Call Tillie Beets."

A young woman was brought in and seated. She was slender, normally curved and red-headed. Youthful bloom was still upon her, hence she was pretty and desirable. Blue eyes that flashed defiance suggested she might, also, have been dangerous.

Claybrook confronted her coolly. "Are you Tillie Beets?"

"Yes I am."

"Sometimes called Sugar Beets?"

"Yes I am."

"Do you work as a waitress down at Euclid Butterhouse's restaurant?"

Hutto got up. "Your Honor, Mr. Claybrook's questions are slightly leading. Accordingly, defendant mildly objects."

"Claybrook," growled Steele, "you heard that objection. Be-consarned, if you aim to lead, be convincing about it."

Claybrook glared at his witness. "When I ask you a question, answer it 'yes' or 'no'. Don't say, *'yes I am'*, or *'yes I do'*. Just say 'yes'."

Tillie's eyes glittered. "When you ask me a question, you ask it any way you please, don't you? Well, I'll answer it any way I please, too." She added angrily, "If you don't like it, don't ask me no questions."

"See hyar, young lady," Steele warned with restrained anger, "you don't talk that way in court. Mr. Claybrook wants to find out what you know about this murder. You just answer his questions; use your own words, but don't use more'n is needed."

"I don't know anything about no murder," Tillie declared warmly.

CLAYBROOK said quietly, "You know more than you think. Now—are you acquainted with defendant, Meetin'-house Joyner?"

"Yes I am."

Claybrook's face pinked, his jaws knotted. "Why didn't you just say 'yes'?"

"I did say 'yes'."

Claybrook breathed hard for seconds. "Miss Beets, did Joyner try to make love to you?"

"Now whose business is that but mine, if he did or didn't?"

Judge Steele leaned toward her.

"Lady, thar's a big horse-trough out front, full of water. How'd you like to be took out thar and held under until you blubber?"

"I wouldn't like it."

"Then you'd better answer these questions, real careful and polite."

Tillie looked scared. Her eyes blinked.

Claybrook repeated, "Miss Beets, did Joyner try to make love to you?"

"Yes he did."

"Did he ask you to marry him?"

"Yes he did."

"Did he say anything about his not having any money?"

"Yes he did."

"What did he say?"

"He said he didn't have much right then, but he expected to have plenty before long."

Hutto got up. "Your Honor, suh, defendant objects, unless Mr. Claybrook can show wherein this examination is relevant."

Claybrook squared himself. "I can explain, Your Honor. Professor Hutto well knows that in making out a case of first-degree murder, it is necessary first to establish a *corpus delicti*—that is, that a murder has in fact been committed. That has been shown by Coroner Boaz Welfare. It is also necessary to show criminal intent, or *men rea*. That has been shown by witness Wilde."

"Now, suh," said Hutto, "what Mr. Claybrook means is, that he has *attempted* to show *mens rea* by witness Wilde. By Wilde he has, of course, proved nothing."

Steele felt his patience getting tight. "Claybrook, why in tarnation is it necessary to pry into this lady's love affairs?"

"Your Honor," said Claybrook, "my purpose thereby is to establish motive for murder. This witness, apparently, was more interested in money than in love. So, to win her, Meetin'-house had to have money. Coroner Welfare has testified that his jury held Shovel-nose Gaffner was murdered in pursuit of a robbery motive."

"That's sufficient, Claybrook. Go on with your questions."

"I have no more questions," Claybrook announced abruptly and sat down.

HUTTO AROSE. "May I cross-examine, suh?"

"Your privilege, Hutto."

Hutto came round. "So you're a waitress at Euclid Butterhouse's restaurant?"

"I said I was."

"And you're sometimes called Sugar Beets?"

"I said I was."

"Now, uh, ahem, are there other candidates for your sugar besides Meetin'-house Joyner?"

"Now see hyar, Hutto," Steele said furiously, "are you trying to insult this lady?"

Hutto became apologetic. "Suh, that was not quite chivalrous, I admit; permit me to apologize to this sweet child. Now, uh, was any other man a suitor for your affections?"

"Yes there was."

"Was this, uh, Clawson Wilde, commonly known as Hog Wilde, also one of your suitors?"

"Yes he was."

Hog Wilde leaned forward, made a threatening noise in his throat. Tillie caught his threat. She said quickly, "Mr. Wilde was just a good friend, that's all."

"Hmmm," said Hutto. "I see you are afraid of Hog Wilde. Perhaps I should not endanger your life by asking further questions." Hutto returned to his seat.

Steele glared at Tillie. "You set down thar with Wilde and Welfare. You might be wanted again."

Tillie sat beside Welfare, deliberately placed Welfare between herself and Wilde.

Claybrook nodded to a deputy. "Call Douglas Gelhorn."

A man of about thirty was brought in. He was strong, good-looking, but of unassuming demeanor.

"Are you one of Sheriff Buckalew's deputies?" asked Claybrook.

"Yes."

"What is your specialty?"

"Crime detection."

"Do you sometimes use bloodhounds in your work?"

Hutto sprang up. "Your Honor, suh, if Mr. Claybrook means to introduce bloodhound evidence, defendant objects. So far, Mr. Claybrook has relied on statements of an inflated and egotistical coroner, an ex-convict and patent liar, and a red-headed, thin-brained shrew. Now, I should like to know if he means to rely in desperation upon testimony of a dog?"

Steele swung on Claybrook. "What do you say to that, Mr. Prosecutor?"

"I suggest that Mr. Hutto kick when he's spurred, not before," said Claybrook.

"I stand ready to kick," declared Hutto.

Claybrook nodded at his witness. "Go ahead, Mr. Gelhorn."

"Yes, Mr. Claybrook, I sometimes use bloodhounds in tracking down criminals."

"Relate what you did by way of investigating Shovel-nose Gaffner's murder."

"I assume you have reference to my use of Dan Trewhitt's bloodhound?"

Claybrook nodded.

Witness Gelhorn thought a moment. "I also presume evidence has been presented as to a bloody axe?"

"It has," said Claybrook.

"Well, in handling that weapon Gaffner's murderer, of course, left his spoor, or body odor. Our bloodhound caught his spoor from that and promptly led us to Meetin'-house Joyner's shack and its front door. There he scratched in what appeared to be an effort to enter. His baying enroute and at Joyner's door indicated a strong spoor. Inside this shack, we found Joyner—alone."

Hutto got up sadly. "Your Honor, suh, defendant begs to be shown upon what authority of law evidence of this dog is introduced."

STEELE was both disappointed and angry. Here was an innocent man who was about to be convicted, and he knew of no legal way in which to stop it. "Claybrook, you've got a job hyar; justify yourself."

Claybrook stood straight and confident. "If Your Honor please, it is not insisted that bloodhound evidence is conclusive of guilt. It is circumstantial only. As to what weight is to be given such evidence, depends upon various elements of which your bloodhound is or is not constituted. I should like to ask Mr. Gelhorn further questions, if I may."

Steele consented grudgingly, "All right, ask 'em."

"Mr. Gelhorn, where did Dan Trewhitt get this bloodhound?"

"I might say first," replied Gelhorn, "that his name is Gabriel. That name was given him because, when he bays, you think doom's-day has arrived. It's a last-trumpet sound, especially for a murderer who has left his scent behind."

To hear what was being said, men had leaned forward. They were eager to catch every word. That silence suddenly became a hush, for distantly a hound's baying voice drifted to them.

Claybrook, slightly unnerved, said, "Go ahead, Mr. Gelhorn."

Gelhorn, unperturbed, continued. "This bloodhound was given to Dan Trewhitt by a cousin, one Oliver Trewhitt, a deputy-warden at Missouri State Prison. Oliver Trewhitt is an expert trainer. Gabriel was trained by this man." He paused when a distant baying was heard again.

Hutto got up. He trembled slightly;

his voice was shaky. "Your Honor, suh, a dog's testimony cannot be based upon training alone."

"That is true," said Gelhorn. "Individual merit, as well as training, must be considered. Also, pedigree." Gelhorn took a binder of papers from his coat pocket. "I have here a certified record, which Mr. Hutto may examine, if he wishes and it is permissible. Gabriel is from a long line of great dogs. He, like his ancestors, has been trained in tracking human beings. Out of over two hundred tries, he has failed three times. Under circumstances then existing, no dog could have succeeded, for there had been a change of clothing and, in one instance, evidence of use of *aqua ammonia;* in another, of some pungent oil."

Hutto had remained standing. "Now, Your Honor, defendant objects to further statements as to this hound. It is fundamental in our law that a witness may not testify unless he is under oath. Nor may his testimony be considered unless opportunity is given for cross-examination. A dog can neither take an oath nor be cross-examined."

Claybrook also was up. "Now, Your Honor, rules that apply to human beings do not apply to bloodhounds. A human being may have prejudice, hence a motive to testify falsely. That is why he is placed under oath; that is why perjury is made a crime. A bloodhound has no motive to testify falsely, and it is presumed that his testimony is without bias."

"Now, suh," insisted Hutto, "it has not been shown that this Gabriel bloodhound—"

Hutto stopped. A baying so much nearer as to come as a deep-throated howl, floated in upon them. Deathly stillness prevailed.

STEELE'S nostrils dilated. Something was going on here that he had not been made acquainted with. He suspected both Hutto and French Demeree of having a hand in it. Consarn their nerve! "Hutto, whar's your friend Demeree?" he demanded fiercely.

Hutto braced himself. Closer and closer came that last-trumpet sound. "Your Honor, suh, Mr. Demeree stands at yonder door."

Steele shifted his savage eyes. A tall, slender man in black suit, white vest and four-in-hand necktie leaned quietly against a door-facing.

"Demeree," Steele demanded vehemently, "come up hyar and take your place."

Demeree, clean-shaved and dark-haired, came forward and stood beside Hutto. "Yes, Your Honor?"

"What in tarnation's goin' on hyar?"

Demeree nodded Hutto to his seat. "May it please Your Honor, I have been enjoying life as a spectator this past minute or so."

"Well, consarn you, whar have you been?"

"Assuming that you have a right to ask, Your Honor, I shall answer by further questioning this witness."

"Question him."

Demeree waited deliberately until that baying sound came again. It was ever-nearer; its effect was blood chilling. "Mr. Gelhorn," said Demeree, "my able associate, Mr. Hutto, was about to say it had not been shown that Gabriel had been given free rein, but may have been guided to defendant's door by human agencies."

Gelhorn nodded. "That is a good point, Mr. Demeree. Gabriel, however, was given free rein. He was on a leash, of course, but he was in front, and nobody interfered. There were tracks of men and horses, plenty of them, but it is a strange gift a bloodhound of merit possesses. Once he is made acquainted with a spoor, he can follow it across countless intervening spoors, just as a man, by sight, can follow a familiar figure through a crowd."

Claybrook got up. "I object, Your

Honor. I had not finished with direct exmination of this witness. Mr. Demeree and Mr. Hutto have undertaken cross-examination out of turn."

"Set down thar," snapped Steele. "Demeree, git after this bloodhound business."

From a few blocks away a baying rose, loud, savage, insistent.

"I fear," said Demeree, "that our time is short. Meantime, I suggest that Mr. Buckalew's deputies keep their eyes on that swine over there who is so aptly called Hog Wilde."

Eyes turned toward Wilde. They beheld a man scared colorless.

Demeree continued, "Mr. Gelhorn, you were summoned as a witness by Mr. Claybrook, were you not?"

"Yes, sir."

"After you received your summons, did you conduct further investigation? If so, describe it."

"Yes, Mr. Demeree. In company with yourself and Dan Trewhitt, I went to defendant Joyner's shack. I had observed without comment that when Joyner's door was opened, Gabriel did not attempt to attack Joyner, but manifested rather surprising indifference. Gabriel's interest was centered on a spot just back of Joyner's doorstep, as if that spoor he followed had there disappeared. But afterwards I got to thinking more about Gabriel's strange behavior. Accordingly you, Dan Trewhitt, and I made a search.

"And sure enough, concealed under Joyner's floor just behind his doorstep we found a big pair of shoes. These, we knew, were too large for Joyner. Our natural conclusion was that a man other than Joyner had murdered Gaffner and, expecting Mr. Trewhitt's bloodhound would be put on his trail, sought to trick our bloodhound into accusing another. Horse tracks nearby indicated, too, that whoever left those shoes had not only changed shoes, but also had mounted a horse and ridden away."

GELHORN stopped. Two or three blocks distant terrifying howls moved slowly nearer.

"Proceed quickly," said Demeree.

"A plan formed," said Gelhorn. "Those shoes were carefully wrapped to preserve their scent, which was distinctive enough. I assure you. We had only random notions as to whom those shoes belonged, but we felt fairly certain their owner would attend this trial. It was our plan, effective shortly after court convened, to give Gabriel had been given free rein, but may shoes, then let him search for their companion spoor in Flat Creek's streets."

"May I add, Your Honor," said Demeree, "that I accompanied Mr. Trewhitt on his latest expedition, that I was present when Gabriel smelled those shoes, also present when he struck a spoor and leaped violently against his leash. It must now be evident to all that he is headed for this court room. I trust we have Your Honor's permission for him to enter, for it is a certainty he will point an accusing finger, so to speak, at Gaffner's murderer."

Flat Creek's crowded court room filled with gasping, murmuring terror as a huge hound reared into its entrance and a loud, angry baying poured out of its red mouth.

A big deputy-sheriff, almost seven feet tall and weighing easily two hundred-fifty pounds, followed Gabriel in. He halted a moment. "Is it all right, Judge?"

"Come ahead, Trewhitt," Steele shouted.

Steele lowered his eyes then for a quick look at Hog Wilde. What he saw was a revelation. Wilde was pale; his eyes were so wide they seemed distended from their sockets; his hands shook as from palsy.

Gabriel came steadily forward, straining hard, sniffing and baying. Inside that inner sanctum where lawyers, witnesses, judge and officers were gathered, Gabriel turned right and sud-

denly lunged at Hog Wilde. Trewhitt held him under powerful restraint.

Every person present, including Judge Steele, had risen. Sugar Beets was screaming.

Wilde had got up. He tried to push himself back. "Don't let him git me! Don't let him git me!"

Trewhitt allowed Gabriel to inch closer and to lunge.

Wilde screamed. "No! No! Keep him back! I done it! I done it! I killed old Gaffner. I killed him—I killed him."

Steele nodded at Sheriff Buckalew. "Better get ready to take Hog Wilde out a back way, Bucky."

Buckalew nodded at several deputies.

Trewhitt subdued his bloodhound and took him out. Wilde was so scared and limp, he had to be carried.

Order returned slowly.

Steele looked at Claybrook. "Anything else, Mr. Prosecutor?"

Claybrook got up. "Your prosecuting attorney knows when he's beaten, Your Honor. A directed verdict of not guilty is clearly indicated."

Steele looked at his jurors, all of whom appeared unnerved. "A verdict of not guilty is directed, gentlemen." He turned to Buckalew. "Recess court, Bucky."

Buckalew rose and pounded with his gun. "Court's in recess till one o'clock. Get out quietly."

They got out like an unchained hurricane. When they were gone and Judge Steele sat alone, he discovered that he was too weak to get up.

Be-consarned if this wasn't once when court could better have got along without a judge. He wiped his sweaty face with a blue bandana, at last got life into his legs and slid down onto his feet. Once in a great while this Demeree from Tennessee did something commendable. But, by thunder, he couldn't be depended on to do it every day.

★

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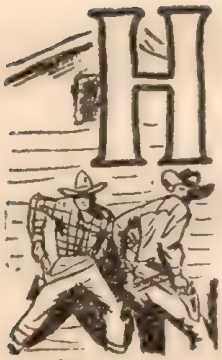
SHIRT-TAIL HONESTY

Special Feature by G. E. Robinson



HONESTY was the ruling passion of '48. If an hombre got broke he asked the first one he met to loan him such an amount as he wanted until he could 'dig her out'. The loans were always paid according to promise.

Many times the name of the borrower was not known. No matter how rough or tough the gent looked, if his demeanor proclaimed him a working man that was all the security needed. On the day it was promised it was duly returned usually with an additional pound and a bottle of brandy. Any lender was considered "A damned fine feller" in the eyes of the borrower. There is a saying that no law was needed until the lawyers came; there were few crimes until the courts came with their delays and technicalities and took the place of the miner's law.

This shirt-tail honesty that was so prevalent in '48 slowly became extinct as the throngs thickened around the various gold camps in '49. The call of the west, the gold fields and easy pickin's brought hordes of pickpockets, robbers, theives and downright swindlers to mix with the men who had come with honest intentions. Murder became an everyday word and thefts and heavy robberies soon became the order of the day. Instead of the miner's law, whipping on the bareback, cutting off the ears and hanging soon became as frequent an occurrence as theft, robbery and murder.

In 1848 there was no effective government in California. Communities such as San Francisco, Monterey and the Pueblo de Los Angeles relied upon a single official called an Alcalde who combined the duties of mayor and judge to administer their business and deal out justice. Col. R. B. Mason, the Military Governor at Monterey had little power and especially after the desertion en masse of his soldiers to the mines.

If the Alcalde didn't wish to assume the responsibility himself, he called a jury. The usual costs were three ounces for the Alcalde's fee, two for the Sheriff, and one each for the jurors—with the addition of the price of all whisky consumed by judge, jury and witnesses during the trial. In criminal cases, the charges were assessed against the defendant, if he had the dust; otherwise no fee was paid.

This type of justice by the ounce worked as illustrated by the case of Filepe Fernandez and Miguel Rinaldes. The two of them had mined for almost a year and had accumulated a large amount of gold. They had had no trouble, with the exception of their eternal argument as to the ownership of Millie, one small, very stubborn mule. The argument grew to such proportions that it was finally decided to take their troubles to the Alcade who would settle them post haste.

The Alcalde promptly called court to order in the local saloon. The Alcalde demanded his fee of three ounces and received it. Then each plaintiff proceeded to explain his case. His Honor, informed them they would need a jury. They agreed, paying the

Sheriff two ounces to summon twelve jurors. After hearing the arguments, the jury promptly returned a verdict that neither plaintiff had produced any evidence of ownership and that each should be assessed half the costs of the court which had then amounted to twenty ounces including one each for the jurors and three for whisky and then "draw cuts" for the mule. The plaintiffs agreed cheerfully and went their way satisfied.

While shirt-tail honesty had vanished, washed down the sluice boxes, a new type of justice, justice by the ounce had taken its place.

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SPECIAL FEATURE

GUNS AND MEN

by Lauran Paine

IT TOOK all kinds and temperments of men to make the West we know as it is today. Some were supreme egotists; others were reckless; many just didn't give a damn, while many had high ideals and ethics. Whatever they were—however they believed and lived, they all had one thing in common—they were men!

Killers, drygulchers, or gunfighters, the men and guns that secured the West—or forestalled its coming of age, whichever you prefer—differed greatly. Doc Holliday, for instance, was a heavy drinker, and as dangerous as a sidewinder when drinking or drunk. Apparently liquor had little affect on his vision or ability to use his gun—which was a .38 caliber, nickel plated, double-action Colt—for he survived several fights while inebriated. Upon occasion, too, Holliday toted a shotgun with him. This usually when a fight was imminent, although he didn't do this often, in spite of persistent claims that he was never without his sawed-off friend.

Billy-The-Kid had neither scruples, ethics or anything that might pass for honor. He was a murderer, purely and simply. Having small hands, Billy favored the .41 caliber Colt double-action to the larger .44-40 he also used. These .41s are fairly hard to come by nowadays, and are, in effect, a smaller but just as efficient scale model of the .45 Peacemaker, except that they were double-action guns.

Billy was a great hand to practice with his guns. Frequently his need for moving targets was supplied by surprised Indians he ran across in Arizona and New Mexico. In order to achieve the effect of rapid movement he liked,

Billy would blast once over the Indian's head, then used the ducking, dodging, thoroughly-frightened man as his target. In time he became very proficient in marksmanship; and this practice also, may have given rise to his comment that he "didn't count Indians or Meskins" among his victims.

Wyatt Earp wore two Colts' guns. One was a .45 single-action job with a seven and one-half inch barrel; the other, worn on his right hip, was the same make and caliber, but had a twelve inch barrel, and was known as The Buntline Special—for Ned Buntline, novelist, who presented him with the thing. Earp was a calm, calculating man who never drank until he was upwards in middle life. He was never heard of practicing with guns as long as he lived, and yet he was both a superb marksman as well as a deadly man on the draw. This was in direct contrast to Wild Bill Hickok, whose family today, incidentally, manufactures belts.

Wild Bill was a man who shot upon the slightest provocation. He was deadly, quick-tempered and cool. He was a firm believer in giving the other fellow "an even break", but primarily, I suspect, because he feared public resentment, should he be proven or known to have done otherwise. Also, Wild Bill had a tremendous amount of confidence that seemed well-founded, since he emerged from as many scrapes as any mortal man, until he stupidly allowed himself to be seated in an exposed condition in a card game, and was assassinated.

Hickok's gunfighting prowess was attributable to a brace of ivory gripped Colt 1851 Navy pistols, .36 caliber, which he later traded in for a pair of single-action Peacemakers, caliber .45; when he was murdered, he was carrying a Smith & Wesson .32 rim-fire tip-up revolver in his coat pocket. Also secreted about his person was his favorite derringer, a Williamson .41 caliber single-shot little belly-gun that used rim-fire bullets, or could be used as a percussion muzzle-loader.

Wild Bill constantly practised with his guns, although he used more agreeable targets—and less reluctant ones—than did The Kid. Hickok, one time, rode past a telegraph pole at full tilt on his horse, and shot his initials into the pole before he was past it. Such was the ability of this man who lived—and died—by the gun. Practice made him perfect, and carelessness laid him low.

THE VARIOUS Winchester carbines of lever action derived their origin from patents bought out from the Henry rifle, calibered originally .44. This Winchester carbine, lever-action gun remains probably the most popular deer gun yet today, in spite of many later makes and models that shoot faster, farther, and hit harder. In the West, perhaps, sentiment has a lot to do with it, no doubt; I know it does with me.

The oldtimers had a trick of working over the lever-action gun's levering loop by making it into a large loop that added weight, so that the gun could be levered by a charging horseman without having to use his hands for the chore. He simply gave the gun a downward shake and inertia from the weighted lever cocked the gun for him. This creation, however, lost out because of its awkwardness, coupled with the fact that the monstrous levering loop couldn't be shoved into a saddle boot.

The Winchester Model 1873 was a very popular gun when it came out, but also another make of gun of the same year made history and was taken to the heart of the frontiersman. The Springfield .45-70 single shot government issue carbine that was carried to its first immortality by Custer's Seventh Cavalry that ill-starred June 25th, 1876.

The southwestern Indians also took to this rugged little gun. When Geroni-

mo surrendered at Skeleton Canyon, he as well as his recalcitrants were carrying badly-scarred and used editions of this simplified, easily-repaired and altogether rugged little carbine.

The repeating gun got its baptism at the Wagon-Box Corral fight where a handful of embattled wood-cutters and soldiers stood off, successfully, many hundereds of Red Cloud's Red Horde. It was here that an old Indian made the classic statement concerning the lever-action gun. "Damn!" he said. "Load 'em Sunday, shoot 'em all week."

But until the advent of the repeating firearm, rifle and pistol, the white frontiersman had no margin of firepower superiority over the Indian, for not only were the older guns such as the wheel lock, matchlock and similar cumbersome weapons, uncertain in firing dependence, they were also—like their more famous and deadly cousin, the Kentucky rifle—too slow. One shot at a time in the old muzzle-loaders was a poor match for the Indian's deadly war-bow, which could unlimber as high as fifteen to twenty-five accurate arrows, with almost as great a killing range as the old rifles. In fact, the red men soon learned to bait the white man until he had shot his one charge; then, while he was frantically re-loading, they'd come in on a dead run and make a pincushion out of him. The coming of the repeating gun changed all this, however, and the balance of power swung in favor of the better armed white man, with disastrous and tragic effect on the Indians.

BUT OF ALL the deadly weapons of the West, the least honored, most murderous and only gun that commanded wholesome respect five to eight decades ago, and is still given full deference today—in the West as anywhere on earth that prudent men gather, or live with guns—remains the awesome, sawed-off shotgun.

Make isn't a matter of preface with this weapon. It can be a cheap Belgium gun, an American product like a Browning, or an off-breed from some gun crank's workshop; it's still the worst gun on earth at close range. In the hands of a blind man at fifty feet, or in the hands of a "shotgun messenger" riding above his little green bullion box above the boot of a Wells Fargo stage, the sawed-off shotgun has humbled the toughest, hardest, most reckless men of this or any other era. You can't miss with a shotgun at close range, and no one who has ever challenged this statement is around to contest it.

There is an old saying to the affect that "you can't improve on perfection". If ever that is true, it is in this case. Frowned upon, frequently despised, and rarely honored, the sawed-off shotgun remains, after the others are long gone, as efficient an engine of destruction as was ever devised, and it is doubtful if anyone will ever conjure up a handier, more deadly weapon for close-range slaughter than this one.

The guns, and the men who lived by and with them, are a part of our national heritage and we are proud of them for their individual contributions to the tapestry of our nation; good or bad, killers or heros or just plain, common everyday men, they were Americans formed and sustained by their times, their environments, and their codes. And whatever we, or others think of them, no one will ever truthfully deny—they were men!

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A New Caleb Doorn novelet, AMBUSH AT BENT HORN, by Lauran Paine, is in the current issue of

DOUBLE ACTION WESTERN

Branded as a star-packer who'd turned lobo, hunted by his former associates, Val Gordon welcomed the chance to step into a dead man's shoes—a hombre who'd been mistaken for Gordon. Then Val found that, in his new identity, he was in a far worse position...

THE GUN-GHOST OF TOLCROSS

by Harlan Clay

NOVELET OF TANGLED TRAILS

VAL GORDON rode into Trigger Hill just in time to see himself die. It was a peculiar experience. His own gun hand was itchy, ready to fly to the butt in self-defense at a split second's notice. It was a strange feeling for him to be a wanted man; he had been a deputy of the Law for several years, a hunter of outlaws. He came up out of the hollow, by the blacksmith shop on his bogged-down hammerhead cayuse, into little Trigger Hill's single street. Then there was the yell of warning and the crash of a gun and the man bursting through the batwing doors of the barroom.

He legged it as if the devil rode his coattails toward the bay mare tethered down the line in the shade of a giant cottonwood. But halfway to it his boot-heel caught in a hole in the boards leading over a mud-hole beside the road and he went sprawling. The still smoking Colt flew from his grip. And the second man, sleeving the blood from a bullet nick off his cheek, stepped out of the barroom. Two levelled guns spiked before him and

his face with the thin line of black mustache was out-thrust.

But the showdown was postponed for the moment. A baby girl, sun-bonnet bouncing on her back, toddled out from an alley midway between the two. A woman in a doorway across the road screamed. The child stumbled and sat down in the dust, crying as it knuckled at its eyes. It was right in the line of fire.

A white-haired man rushed off the General Store porch and dashed toward the child. Other men had emerged from the barroom. Two jumped forward and gripped the arms of the half-crouched gunslinger with the black mustache. Coming down the road, weary Val Gordon peered from red-rimmed eyes as he straightened his body in the saddle. There was something vaguely familiar about the gunslinger on the saloon steps. The tall flat body with the wide sloping shoulders. A certain catlike grace in every movement. The bared head with the shock of gleaming black hair.

The fat bartender in the flour-sack apron hopped out of the swinging doors, a double-barrelled shotgun clutched. He ran over to the ragweed-choked gutter so he could cover both antagonists. "Hold it, both you gents!" he commanded, bald head gleaming under the sun. "Pen them hoglegs or I'll blast you both! No shootin' yet—till we git the baby outa the way!"

It was like a tableau, most of the figures frozen in their tracks. The old-timer reached the baby girl. Down the line, the fleeing man had crawled furtively to his dropped gun, had it, was rising from the ground. The tall one with the black mustache lowered his weapons. "Don't run for it, Chuck," he called softly. "I'm warning you."

The baby squawled as it was lifted and carried back to the General Store porch. And the bartender took control. "All right. This is a-goin' to be a fair and square shootin'. Holster them hoglegs first!"

Both men obeyed slowly. The barman motioned the one with the black mustache to come down off the steps into the road. He did.

"Everybody else outa the way!" the barman went on. "Now, you two turn 'round and face the other way. Backs toward each other! Yeap! 'S it! Now—" He told them they would pace off, moving away from each other, while he counted to ten. Then they could turn and fire when they chose. That bartender had always had a yearning to be a lawman. "All right. One—two—"

They started to pace off, widening the distance between themselves. The man who had been fleeing moved nervously, stepping high, jerking his head around furtively, hand twitching above his holster. The black-mustached hombre walked in long easy strides, leaving little dust plumes behind his boots, long arms swinging loose. Val Gordon had dropped from the saddle to move over toward the buildings at one side, studying that second man.

"—eight—nine—" chanted the barman, now on the saloon steps.

GORDON stepped forward, toward the black-mustached one, about to cry out. And then somebody shouted from the other side of the road: "Burn him down Gordon!"

Val Gordon galvanized, one of his long-fingered hands twining on his gun butt. He shot a sweeping glance around, tensed, head lowered to shadow his face with his sombrero brim. But he could see nobody looking his way or pointing him out. He was baffled.

"Ten!" And the two men had swirled about, set. The whole road seemed to hold its breath. All eyes were locked on the pair. They started to move back toward each other, the shorter one at the other end jerking his clawed hand halfway to his sheathed gun, then freezing it. The tall one with

the line of mustache stalked forward steadily, a certain deadliness about him.

"Draw when you're ready, Chuck," he called.

Seconds stretched into ageless spaces of time; the distance closed. And then the one called Chuck broke, leaping sideward toward the trunk of a fat tree. He had his gun out and almost made it, jerking up the weapon in a panic. The tall man had filled both hands with a deceptive-looking flowing motion. Chuck fired, wildly, his lead digging the road yards from the other. The latter's right gun slashed powder flame.

Chuck was on one knee, hit in the leg . He tried to fire again. But the tall hombre was crouched, steady, deadly sure. His other Colt spoke. And Chuck rolled over, drilled in the right shoulder, gun in the dust.

It seemed to be over. The tall man loped forward, watchful. Chuck had rolled onto his stomach, moaning, right hand clawing the dust in pain. He seemed finished, especially with his shooting arm out of commission. Men came yelling out of the barroom to congratulate the winner. He blew on his smoking weapons and half turned. The man called Chuck made his snaky play then.

He had rolled over on his dropped gun that everybody had forgotten about. Now, using his left hand, he jerked it from under his body, got it cocked. Coming up from behind the victor, hawk-eyed Val Gordon tried to yell. But his voice was lost in the bark of the gun explosion. And the man with the black mustache, drilled through the side and lungs, sank to his knees, mortally hit.

A convulsion of pure fury seized him. With people screaming and stampeding back, he forced his shaking guns level and rode both hammers like mad. He poured a hail of death into the prone Chuck before he went flat on his own face. Both men died almost in the same moment.

Everybody stood stunned for moments. Gunsmoke drifted down the street in the slight oven-hot wind off the range. A mongrel dog came out from beside the barroom, sniffed toward Chuck, then turned tail whimpering. Gordon was one of the first to the bodies. He bent over the tall black-mustached one to make certain. And he saw he was right. The hombre was—

"It's him all right. Knowed him the instant I walked into the barroom just before the gunning busted out," one of the townsmen said as he pointed at the black-mustached gent. "It's Val Gordon, deputy sheriff from over Tolcross way."

"Yep, guess you're plumb right, Jed," another onlooker agreed. "I was at Dutchman's Bend the time Gordon captured them two hoss-thieves. 'S him —even if he ain't awearing his badge. I know that black mustache."

"Who's the other dead one?" somebody else asked.

Unnoticed, the living Val Gordon stood staring down at the body that had been identified as his. As a lawman, he knew the man at his feet. It was Mathias Trumbo, gunman, a lone wolf lobo who was wanted by the law for several holdups and shootings. He was a cold-blooded killer when cornered. Gordon had seen him once, knew him well from the pictures on reward handbills. The thin black moustache, though, was something new. Evidently he had cultivated it fairly recently as a disguise.

"Gordon sure blasted the daylights outa that fella—even as he died himself, didn't he, stranger?" a man said to the real Val Gordon. "A fighting devil right to his last breath!"

GORDON GRUNTED something vaguely, hand over his own mouth. On his upper lip was a narrow strip of

black mustache, too. But his beard stubble was so long the mustache was barely noticeable, he realized as he felt it.

The mistaken identity was understandable. The late Trumbo was tall and flat-bodied and rangy-shouldered like himself. Both of them had black hair, a shock of it. Gordon's own eyes were black in his tanned face. Dead Trumbo's were round, grayish, but in his death agony he had squeezed them closed and they remained thus now. To a casual observer who had not known either man too well—to the two who had identified the dead man, Trumbo might well have been Val Gordon.

"We'll have to send word over to Tolcross that Gordon's dead," one of the latter said. "A right long ride, too. Coupla days."

And the real Val Gordon, about to speak, clamped up his jaw hard. It came to him suddenly. This was his chance to escape, to live. When that posse from Tolcross, bitterly and grimly tracking him down, swung in they would be informed that Deputy Gordon had died in a gun duel. He would be officially dead.

"Don't know who that there Chuck fella was, do you, stranger?" he was asked. And Gordon shook his haggard, sunken-eyed face with its veritable thicket of unshaven beard. He didn't tell them he knew who the other dead man was, either; that it was Trumbo, not Gordon.

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EVERYBODY in the somnolent range town was too excited about the gun-battle to ask questions of a stranger. Especially one who looked as if he were busted and riding the grub-line. Val Gordon went into the barroom and had himself sevaral drinks. He ordered some grub and wolfed it down quickly as he sat at a window that commanded a view of the trail coming into the town from the north. The posse from Tolcross would come from that direction when they came.

The bodies of the two dead had been searched for the purposes of identification. On the one called Chuck all that had been found was a letter from a sister asking him to come home and settle down. But the envelope was gone, so there was no possibility of finding out who he was. Gordon had held his breath while they went through the clothes of Trumbo, the man they took for him. They had found over two hundred dollars in bills, a rude hand-drawn map of some unknown trail. There was a picture of a dance-hall girl with "Love from Tisa" on it in another pocket. Some chewing tobacco, an empty shell with a date scratched on it, in another. A rabbit's hind leg in another. And that was all.

Gordon let out a sigh of relief when he saw that. Now, the two bodies were on the lading platform of the General Store across the road. They were being sewed up in tarpaulin preparatory to burial.

A rider appeared over the rise by the blacksmith shop. Gordon spotted him through the window and dropped his fork to slide his hand to a holster. But it was only a plow-chaser on a sway-backed crowbait drawing a homemade cart behind. The fugitive had a few more drinks. A man came in and said the bodies were ready to go. They were over on the General Store porch, wrapped up on some planks nailed together to serve as biers. They needed pall bearers.

"Free drink to the boys who help carry the poor devils up the hill," the bartender proclaimed.

A few minutes later, curling-brimmed sombrero drawn low, Val Gordon was outside and moving up the

Somehow the road agents knew not only that the mine payroll was on this stage, but they knew exactly where it was, too!

hill with the little procession. He was attending his own funeral. He had to be certain Trumbo was safely interred as him before he went on. A horseman came into town from the south, drew up to inquire whom the Boothill party was for. When he learned, he dismounted and followed the column, a tow-headed man with pronouncedly bowed legs.

The path wound through a patch of scrub oak to emerge on a sandy shelf overlooking the street. Lopsided irregular rows of homemade crosses and weed-grown mounds stretched along the shelf. It was Trigger Hill's Boothill. There was a wait in the garing sun while a couple of men scraped through a layer of broken rock to deepen the second grave. Folks stood and mopped their faces and discussed the double killing still, in hushed voices. A pair of buzzards drifted overhead, rusty black slivers against the cloudless sky.

Gordon's guarded eyes kept swivelling down toward the northern end of the street. If they came now, the posse from Tolcross, he'd have to slip around to the livery stable where he had left the cayuse to be grained and groomed. It might be a case of taking any pony he could lay his hands on. But once Trumbo was buried, buried as Val Gordon, he could slope out and be safe. Safe because he would be officially dead. It was a strange thing to happen to a man.

Drawing on a charred stub of quirly, then forgetting it when it went out, his mind went back to the things that had led up to the situation. There had been several holdups on the stage lines passing through Tolcross. So when the monthly payroll for the silver mine up in the hills was due to come through, a plan had been made. The payroll woud be sent through on the stage run before its usual date of shipment. That would be two days earlier. No guards would pick it up in the dangerous Crazy Rock country. Three men had been lost on that mission already. And without guards the ruse would be that much more likely to work.

The afternoon of the night the stage was due in, word had come to town that some rustlers had been tracked into the Burro Hills up back of the Broken Bit outfit. Gordon and J. T. Stephens, the older deputy, had gone out on the hunt. The rustler trail had split at a point where two draws forked off into the hills. Each had moved into a draw, agreeing to meet at the fork by dawn or before and report what they had found.

Gordon had overtaken one bunch, engaged in a light skirmish, then lost them when they abandoned the stolen cattle and vanished into a big spit of mesquite jungle that ran out into the desert the other side of the hills. When he got back to the fork, Stephens was there, reporting he had found nothing. They had returned to town.

THE STAGE was overdue. Searchers went out to find it. They hadn't brought it in until sundown; it had taken them some time to procure horses to draw it in. Because they had found it in a box canyon in the Crazy Rocks, well off the trail, its team shot in their traces. The mule-skinner and a passenger had been killed, another wounded, a school marm. And the mine payroll was gone.

That last had been no accident. For, as the guard told it, the shooting had no sooner stopped when the leader of the road agents had begun bawling to his men to get the mine dinero out of the chest atop. They had known of the ruse. Tolcross had immediately started to seethe. Everybody was talking about a doublecross.

And Gordon had been walking through the Eldorado Hotel lobby where the passengers were when the wounded school marm had leaped up, swaying with her bandaged head, to jab a trembling finger at him. "There he goes—the tall one with the black mustache! He was one of them! I saw

him." She had fallen back in hysterics, but she calmed enough to describe how the leader's mask had slipped just after he rode up to the door to gun-whip down a passenger trying to fight back. How she had seen his face distinctly in the yellow moonglow before he jerked it back up again. "It was him," she quavered, indicating Gordon again.

Surprised, he had laughed it off. So had everybody else—at first. They knew Val Gordon. His father before him had been the sheriff. He himself was looked upon as a likely successor to Barles when he retired at the end of his term. They remembered the time he had kept the Hawkins bunch holed up for two days straight while going half crazy with a feverish leg wound. The school marm was doubtlessly a little locoed after her experience, so they said.

But a little before dawn that night, Gordon had been awakened by a friend. And warned. J. T. Stephens had done a heap of talking down at one of the bars. He had said that when he waited for Val that morning at the fork of the draws in the hills, he had been there first. And that when Gordon came, instead of riding out of the draw, he had circled in from the east, the direction in which the stage road ran through the Crazy Rock country. Men had put that together with the testimony of the school teacher. They figured it was Gordon the deputy, knowing of the scheme, who had pulled the double-cross. They were coming for him now.

He remembered how he had pulled on his boots, picked up his holsters, trying to think. "I'll stay and face 'em," he had said.

Now up on the sandy shelf over Trigger Hill, the second man stepped out of the last grave. The white-headed patriarch who had removed the baby girl from the road opened up the Bible and began to read in a reedy voice with sweat dripping from his long nose.

Gordon went back to that fatal dawn when he had made his decision. He had meant to face them, but his friend had warned him. Barles the sheriff had been carried to his home earlier that evening with one of his heart spells, was out of the picture therefore. This was a lynch mob, already muttering about getting a rope over a limb. There would be no lawful procedure, no trial. They had taken Stephens' word.

"Bust the breeze and come back when things cool down," the friend had advised. "My brother's getting a pony saddled up down at my place now. Clear out for now, Val." And he had allowed himself to be persuaded.

It had been a ghastly mistake; he knew that now. He had learned that every man is your foe when you are branded as a lawman who has turned bad. That there is no scorn and hate to match that for a badge-wearer who crosses over to the Owlhoot trail. It was no motley bounty-hunting posse trying to give him a catching; they were a bunch primed to ride plumb into the Devil's own corral to put a hempen necktie around his neck. He had found that out. But now—now he was about to be buried, would exist no longer.

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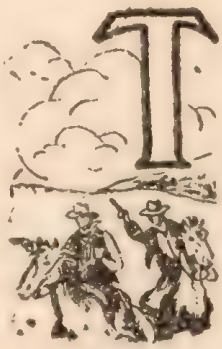

THE TWO canvas-wrapped forms were lowered into the graves. The man who served as a minister tossed a handful of dust onto each. Somebody beside Val Gordon nudged him and motioned him to remove his sombrero.

"Ashes to ashes and dust to dust," intoned the old man. "And may Gawd

have mercy on their souls.... Pax vobiscum!" They started to fill the graves.

Just as he drew on his sombrero Gordon noticed a tow-headed man staring at him from across the graves. The hombre smiled and waved slightly. Val didn't know him and figured he must be signing to somebody else. He went down the hill and got his horse and rode out of town. He was dead, so he could go on living.

At nightfall he rode into Loretto City, a thriving shipping point for the Indian Wash cattle country. He bought a checkered shirt to replace his dust-caked blue one, checked into the Big Steer hotel. He got a bath and managed to wash out the wound in his left shoulder somewhat, then scraped the thicket of beard bristles from his face. He removed his black mustache when he did. Gordon existed no more. Downstairs he had registered as "Joe Manly." Said he was from over Las Cruces way.

He was tired from the grim chase he had been leading that man-hunting posse, but there was a nervous restlessness in him. After stowing away a big dinner, he wandered down the road to a barroom. The whisky was tasteless in his throat. He wished he had stayed and faced them that night in Tolcross. Perhaps he might have been strung up; but now his very flight had convicted him in the eyes of the town, he realized. And he felt coyotish inside himself, as if he had quit under fire.

One aspect of the whole thing really made his blood boil. He would have given a heap to go back and call out that lying J. T. Stephens, the other deputy, to pay him off. But he figured he knew why the other deputy had lied. With him, Gordon out of the way, Stephens would be a surefire cinch to become new sheriff when Barles quit. But Val wasted no time in cursing or bitter dreaming. Though young, there was a certain tough grimness inside him as betokened by the flat-cheeked jaws that could clamp up like a trap.

He turned toward the rear of the place to idly watch a game of stud. There was an argument and the baby-faced house dealer patted his ruffled shirt near where a hideout derringer was secreted. He talked in a wheedling tone to placate the other, saucers of eyes soft. But the serpentine scar in the left of his chin was livid and writhing. "Now, my friend—"

IT WAS THEN that Gordon was tapped on the shoulder. "Some of your friends'd like a word with you, Trumbo." Val half twisted around and saw the speaker was the tow-headed hairpin who had been at the double burial in Trigger Hill. Then Gordon realized what he had been called. "Trumbo!" The name of the dead outlaw who had been mistaken for and buried as him. Trumbo....

The ex-deputy smiled blankly and shook his head. "Reckon you've made a mistake, partner."

The tow-headed one shook his head too, eyes slitting up uglily. "You're the one who made the mistake, Trumbo, trying to sneak off after you cached that dinero alone. Planning to cheat us out of our share, huh?" He had a hand hooked over the walnut butt of his Colts.

Gordon stirred slightly. The other warned him in a hissing whisper. "Don't make no play, Trumbo. Two-three of your ex-partners got you danged well covered." He smirked. "Figured shaving the mustache would fool us?"

It hit Val Gordon then. Just as that townsman back in Trigger Hill had taken the dead Trumbo for him, so this hairpin—who had evidently been in on some—job with the lonewolf gunslinger—mistook him for Trumbo. A kind of panic gripped Gordon. He blurted it before he realized. "You're locoed, mister. I'm Val Gordon, deputy from Tolcross. I—"

The tow-headed one guffawed through the jangle of the brassy piano from the ell where the dancing was. "Quite a wit, ain't you, Trumbo? Gordon was killed in a gun ruckus over at Trigger Hill earlier today. You want to walk along quietlike, or—" His eyes shifted.

Gordon followed then and saw the saturnine man leaning against a post, arms folded across his narrow chest. The ex-lawman realized beneath one of those arms was a drawn gun. There would be others, he sensed. And he made his play, a desperate one.

He snapped his right arm around with his glass of whisky. It caught the tow-headed one flush in the eyes, blinding him as he started to reach for Gordon's hip gun on that side. Then Val lunged sideward along the bar to get out of the line of fire, yanking gun steel with his right hand. A chunk of lead gouged the bar where he had been standing. Another gun roared in the confines of the low-ceiled place. A gunfight was building.

But the proprietor behind the bar was a quick-witted one. He half ducked, came up with a big Colts himself. He rammed it between Gordon's shoulder blades just as the latter came up with his gun. And housemen closed from three sides.

"Hold it, everybody!" the owner yelled through the echoes of the gun thunder. "This is a law-abiding place. Shorty, run for the marshal! Fust man who shoots another slug—"

A pot-bellied man, gray at the temples, stepped forward from beside the man at the post. The latter stood with smoking weapon half lowered. The pot-bellied one pushed back a calfskin vest to flash a lawman's star.

"I'm Speller, peace officer from Las Cruces. This here gent is Joe Manly of the same place." He thumbed at Gordon. Val was trying to place the gent; he recalled him vaguely as being associated with a rustling gang he had smoked it out with once. The ex-deputy knew the badge was a fraud.

"We want to ask him some questions 'bout a killing back there. I aim to take him home," Speller continued authoritatively. "If he's innocent, why's he resisting arrest?"

"That's so," said the barroom proprietor. He jabbed the gun deeper into Gordon's back. "Keep them hands elevated, Manly!"

Val Gordon sucked in his breath as it came to him. Trumbo was dead and buried as him, Gordon. He himself officially existed no more. But he had stepped into Trumbo's boots, and they were the boots of another man accused of the double-cross—the boots of a man wanted by his coyote partners....

THE TWO-HEADED one, at a signal from the bogus John Law, Speller, moved in to relieve the captured Gordon of his guns.

Two tall tough-bitten gents had stepped in front of the double doors of the now hushed place. One of them was the ex-marshal of Loretto City. They had their hands hooked over their guns meanfully as he spoke.

"Reckon we'll just wait for the marshal to git here, boys, afore we go off half-cocked." He squirted tobacco juice. "Ever'body just stay calm and quiet." It was a dictum.

But it was no help to Gordon. If he tried to identify himself, to prove who he really was, the marshal would doubtless hold him to check. And when word got back to Tolcross that Val Gordon, the double-crossing deputy—No, there was no hope in that.

Curious customers, cowhands and card players and dance-hall girls, were edging forward, hedging the quartet of prisoner and captors in. They got between them and the two guarding the door. And the stud dealer with the thread of scar splitting his chin sidled down the bar with a "Pstt!" to Speller. Then he pointed to a door midway down the side of the place. A house

guard held it ajar from the other side.

It all happened quickly as the big, soft-looking gambler, apparently by accident, upset a bottle and sent it rolling along the bar until it crashed to the floor. The proprietor grabbed for it and somebody yelled and the helpless Gordon was whisked away by the trio. Before anybody quite realized it, they were through the door, into a dark room. Speller had coiled an arm about the ex-deputy's throat and had a gun spiking his back. There was no chance for a play.

"Right this way," called the stud dealer from ahead. "Gus'll take care of you."

They went down a narrow dark corridor, bumping the walls as the cardman turned the key in the lock of the door behind them. A door ahead opened onto the star-studded night. They stepped into the backyard of the place to the right of the dance-hall ell. The house guard turned around to take the tow-headed one, in the lead, by the arm, saying something about a step here. The next instant, the house guard had twisted that arm and Towhead screamed with pain as his gun bounced off a tin can on the ground.

Two more men materialized from the shadow of the withered pepper tree beside the back exit. There was a muffled groan from the rear, and Speller's arm was gone from Gordon's neck. The latter turned as Speller went plunging by. Val saw the mild-faced gambler's gun continue the downward arc after having tapped Speller's skull.

The saturnine one who had snapped the first shot at Gordon in the barroom tried to make a play for it. He levered up a gun in a holster hooked to his belt on a swivel. Flame flash jumped from the holster tip and the slug nicked the pepper trees. Then he was flung back against the wall of the building, drilled through the shoulder by one of those shadowy figures working with the gambler.

Gordon himself was already drawn the saddle of the other pony. He had as he stumbled out over the flattened Speller's boots. Strong arms encircled him from the rear, locking his arms to his sides. One of the gambler's men ran over and hooked Gordon's Colts from the scabbards.

"Hey, I'm not one of them—" he began.

"Horses," snorted the hulking one who had led them out of the barroom by way of the corridor. He calmly stepped at Towhead who cringed against the rear wall, struck with an arm like a club. Towhead squealed and got a Bowie blade halfway from his boot. The huge saloon tough battered his face several times more. Towhead doubled. Raising a fist like half a sack of flour, he brought it down hammer-fashion on Towhead's sombrero. The latter flattened like a pancake and Towhead was just a soggy heap on the ground.

Somebody told Gordon to come along even as the rear door closed behind them. They trotted across several back yards, around the neat little fence beside a house, halted at the end of an alley. The pair with Gordon had their guns in their hands, one slightly to his rear. He was unarmed.

"Where're we headed for?" the ex-deputy asked.

"You'll see. Saved your hide, ain't we?" grunted the giant, scratching his almost non-existent forehead with one of his gunsights.

The third one came down the alley with two saddled cayuses. "Borrowed 'em from in front of Brooks' place; don't forgit to send 'em back," he said. "The marshal just went into the place."

One of the men swung into a saddle and told Val to climb on behind. There was no time to argue. Either as Trumbo or Gordon, his life was at stake. "I got a pony over in the hotel stable," he said. "We can swing over there—"

The huge man stared at him from

a way of looking out of his muddy eyes as if he didn't see you, speaking as if to himself. "I think that'd be plumb foolish," he said heavily, wiping a gun barrel on the sleeve of his coat. "Come on, Bart!" And he let the other horse with its double burden swing ahead so that he rode at Gordon's back.

THEY DIDN'T go far. Moving behind one of the sprawling town's sidestreets, they dropped into a little dry wash, turned westward along it. They emerged from it among the low hills beyond the town, crossed the bed of an almost dried-up creek. Then they were turning in past the broken-down ranchyard fence of a little place that had been abandoned as a cow outfit when the outskirts of the prosperous range town had crept toward it.

The first man crossed a sagging porch and worked a key in the padlock of the door. Striking a match, he moved inside and lighted the lantern on a dusty table. Gordon saw that the windows were boarded up with tattered blankets hung over the interior to guarantee against the escape of light. He started to speak again.

"I reckon I owe you gents a heap for snaking me out of that tight. But now I'll be—"

"Going inside," said the huge hombre. He took Gordon by the shoulder from behind; it was like being gripped by a giant vice. He sent him lurching inside and slammed the door behind them with a thrust of his heel. In the lamplight he towered more than ever, simply dwarfing the furniture in the fair-sized front room.

He plucked Val's Colts from the waistband of his jeans, tumbed out the shells and tossed them in a corner, then dropped the guns on the table. The ex-deputy was steadily watched by the first one who stood with dangling gun ready.

"Sit down—there," ordered the giant, pointing at an aged sofa, upholstery bursting through, that stood next to the rusted pot-belly stove against the rear wall.

Gordon's eyes narrowed. "Listen, if I'm a prisoner why—"

"Boss's orders. Don't know nothing," said the other one. "He'll be here soon. Better make yourself comfortable, Trumbo."

"I'm not Trumbo. I'm—" He broke off himself that time. He realized he was a pawn in some game he didn't savvy. He had thought his days as a wanted man were over when Trumbo had been buried as him. But for some unknown reason, Trumbo was valuable enough to some men to make them take long-shot chances. Val's eyes were bitter as he dropped onto the couch and built a quirly. It looked as if destiny had chosen him as its whipping boy.

The low-browed giant sat at the table, a gun at his left, as he tortuously played at a game of solitaire with dog-eared cards. The other sat with his back to the front door, facing Gordon. Occasionally he took his eyes from the prisoner to show the big man an obvious play. The other finally swept the paste-boards to the floor, scowling.

"Danged if I can see what fun the Colonel gits outa that. Cards are crazy." He split a splinter with a thumbnail and began to pick at his teeth.

It was about an hour later that the stud dealer, the Colonel, came. A low quavering whistle was repeated on the night wind. The smaller guard went out back through the kitchen and left the house. The giant waited, after turning the lamp low, both guns drawn. Val thought of flinging himself on him. But when he inched a boot out from his sitting position, the giant came around like a cat. The other man called from the outside that it was the boss.

The giant unbarred the door. A moment after, a buxom dance-hall girl with eyes like a hungry buzzard's and

high-heaped brassy hair stalked in followed by the Colonel, the baby-faced cardman.

"Howdy, Trumbo," said the Colonel, pulling off his sombrero. "Nice night. You oughta feel right good toward me—pulling your hide out like I did."

Gordon only shrugged. "Call me Trumbo if you want."

The Colonel smiled as he fingered his chin scar. "And who might you be?"

Val stood up. "Suppose I told you I was Val Gordon, deputy of Tolcross. The man they're hunting, as a matter of fact." He had decided to be blunt, sensing he was in a tight. He had no intention of paying for any of Trumbo's gun sins.

The Colonel chuckled. "No go, Trumbo. I know that tough Gordon by sight. And he wears a mustache. Get out a drink, boys."

A redeye bottle was brought in from the kitchen. Everybody had a drink but the giant who sat sizing up Gordon sullenly. A trifle impatiently too.

"Let's get down to business, Colonel," the girl said, hard-voiced.

The cardman shined his nails on the lapel of his gray coat. "All right, Trumbo. Where is it cached?"

Val didn't waste time arguing any more. "What?"

The Colonel dropped astride a chair, smiling blandly. "The payroll you stole from the stage outside Tolcross and cached."

GORDON came to his feet with surprise. It burst on him. Trumbo had been the mustached one identified as him by the school-marm. He had never guessed it, even over in Trigger Hill, because he had never thought of Trumbo with the mustache that he had recently grown. But it was plain now as the cardman went on.

"News gets around fast in our circle, Trumbo. You held up the stage. Then you pulled a smart one on the bunch working with you and cached the dinero and up and disappeared. I recognized you the moment the ruckus broke out in the barroom, Trumbo."

What hit Gordon, as a lawman, for the moment was the grapevine of the owlhoot gentry that spread news around the country so fast. News the arm of the Law knew nothing about. Then he realized his own predicament.

"I'm not Trumbo. I never held up the stage. I don't know where any dinero is cached." It was all he could say. And it sounded flat and hollow.

The Colonel said softly, "Little Dan," with a nod to the giant, then refilled his glass unhurriedly. He took a long slow drink. "Trumbo, get it straight. I'm declaring myself in on a piece of that pot you collected when you grabbed the mine payroll. Tell me where you got it cached—and we can do business. I didn't pull you outa that tight before for nothin'. Don't talk—" He nodded toward the giant, Little Dan.

Little Dan had risen to shed his coat. He was rolling up his sleeves now to reveal forearms like a man's thigh. The impatient look was gone from his dull eyes as he measured Gordon like a future piece of business to be taken care of.

"Little Dan is a great persuader, Trumbo."

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VAL GORDON had no choice about what followed. He wasn't Trumbo but couldn't convince them otherwise. And he couldn't tell the Colonel where any dinero was cached because he didn't know. Just one thing he did understand. Speller and Towhead and the other who had jumped him in the Loretto bar were members

of Trumbo's road-agent bunch that had jumped that stage.

"Stop wasting time, Dan!" the hard faced girl spat as she refilled her glass. The giant cast a look her way, smiled childishly, then advanced.

Gordon spread his legs to meet the attack, ducked an awkward blow, and then flailed madly. He drove in both hands with all he had and he was an expert at rough and tumble fighting. But it was like assailing a stone wall. The blows seemed to bounce off Little Dan as he ploughed ahead.

Then Val was against the wall. Little Dan took the heel of his calloused hand and mashed it into Gordon's face. Val reached up and grabbed the giant's lank hair, gouged the thumb of his other hand at an eye. He might as well have been working on a bull.

The breath went from Gordon's body as the giant leaned all his weight against him. A trickle of blood ran down Little Dan's face from the eye socket. But his only response to that was to bang clumsily with an elbow at the side of Val's head. The one-time lawman felt as if he had been clipped by a swinging Winchester stock. He sagged limply. Little Dan forced him lower.

But Gordon had the fighting instincts of a wildcat. He twisted, gouged at Dan's calf with a spurred heel, then flung himself flat. The shambling giant ripped and fell across the sofa. Val was up, swaying but dead game. He had a fleeting glimpse of the Colonel smiling over his glass. Then the ex-deputy had grabbed up a flimsy chair with one leg missing. He crashed it down over Little Dan as the latter shuffled in once more.

There was a lot of flying wood, pieces of the chair rolling off the giant's shoulders. And he came on, advanced unslowed for a single moment. With a torn oath, Gordon leaped in and lashed knuckles at the mouth. Great arms twined around him, lifted him from his feet. Val beat at Dan's

face, saw him spit pieces of broken teeth. Little Dan raised him higher, higher. Then he flung him. Val's back hit the side wall. He vaguely remembered the floor coming up.

When he came around, the Colonel himself was pouring whisky through his lips. Gordon was propped in a chair. The other guard stepped up and dashed a bucket of rancid water into his face.

"Now, about where you have the dinero cached, Trumbo," the Colonel said.

Val tried to shrug. "I don't—d—don't know—I—"

The Colonel raised a pinkish finger to Little Dan. And it started all over again. Gordon couldn't strike anymore with his left; the wounded shoulder had caved in. He remembered going to the floor once with the impervious giant, of being half smothered under his massive hulk. Then he was being lifted in those animal-like arms. Dan's chin pressed against his chest. Val swung weakly. And his chest was being forced back and back. It seemed as if his spine would snap. And blessed unconsciousness took him out of the agony.

When he came to that time, they had him stretched on the sofa. Through a fog he heard the Colonel say he was bleeding from inside.

"Tough critter. I always knew Trumbo had nerve, but—"

"His eyes are opening," the girl said eagerly. "Dan—"

"Wait," said the Colonel. "We

don't want to kill him while there's still a chance he might talk."

"Here! Dan!" The woman, avariciousness glinting from her eyes, took command. "Hold him by the hair!"

Val felt his hair seized and yanked back hard. Then the dance-hall girl, bosom working, was hanging over him. And her cigaret was moving slowly but surely right at his right eye. "Blind men can still talk," she mentioned.

There was no use, Gordon understood. The Colonel's last words had as much as told him so. They wouldn't kill him while they thought he might talk. If he didn't, eventually—

HE GOT out a croaking sound. "All right," he added.

They got him propped before the table, the Colonel smiling and shining his nails enthusiastically. The girl held the glass brimming with whisky to the ex-deputy's face. "Yes—well?" the Colonel prodded. "Yes? Where is the dinero?"

It was time for Gordon to run his bluff. "I can't tell you where, but I'll take you to it... If I do, how much do you want?"

The Colonel chuckled. "I'm not a greedy man, Trumbo. Let's be fair. Fifty-fifty. You cheated your own bunch anyway. And that pard of yours, Jay, he can go chase the devil for his share."

"Jay?" Gordon said thickly, head swaying on his shoulders.

"Give him more redeye, Tess," the Colonel said. "Sure. Jay. I don't know who he is. All I heard is he was the one who worked with you from the inside. What the hell does he matter, anyway? Is it a deal?"

The battered Gordon nodded feebly; there was nothing else for him to do. But when the call came on his bluff, when he had to produce the cache—well, he only hoped he had a hunk of shooting iron in his hand when it happened.

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IT WAS STILL a couple of hours before dawn when they climbed into the saddle and headed westward toward Tolcross. The borrowed ponies had been returned to the main street. Gordon's cayuse had been brought over from the hotel barn. It was he, the captive, the Colonel, and the hulking Little Dan, who slipped furtively away from the old ranchhouse. They worked up through the timbered hills, then swung in a half-circle until they came to the trail some distance beyond Loretto City. The cardman, the Colonel, was plainly worried about being followed by Speller and his partners.

The battered Val Gordon could barely sit the saddle, his tortured body buckling again and again. Little Dan watched him with animal amusement in his stupid face. The Colonel kept feeding the ex-deputy shots from a bottle of redeye. The slow progress irked the Colonel.

It was akin to a long-drawn nightmare to Val himself. He hadn't lost his nerve, but it was morale-shattering to realize that, in his present state, he was just about unable to make a single gesture in self-defense. His skull felt as if it had been cracked and his senses swam with every jolt of the pony beneath him. His whole body was one big aching mass of pain. The festered wound in his left shoulder had been reopened. They had bound it up again but it throbbed with living fire. And at his hips hung his emptied guns. The shells from his cartridge belt had been removed, too. Returning him his weapons was an empty gesture; in case they met up with anybody on the trail, Gordon did not look like a prisoner.

It was not only his physical condition that had the one-time lawman on the verge of cracking. He couldn't see any way out. No longer did he have to worry about the posse from Tolcross; now, he almost wished they would overtake him. But it was a vain hope. The posse would have come into Trigger Hill and learn that Val Gordon had been slain in a bitter-end gun duel and been identified as the deputy by two men before he was buried. The posse would go no further.

There was a chance Speller and Towhead and the other might pick up the trail. They evidently wanted Trumbo badly. But for Jim Gordon that would be simply like leaping from the skillet into the fire. They believed, taking him for the late Trumbo, that he had doublecrossed them after the hold up of the stage. They, too, would take means to find out where the loot was cached, just as the Colonel had.

There was the final alternative; that Speller would not catch up. That he, Gordon, with the Colonel and Little Dan would come to Tolcross unapprehended. And that would be the final showdown with a bullet in the back as the probable payoff for Gordon, because he did not know where the dinero was hidden. His bluff would be called then.

HIS PAIN-GUTTED face twisted in a silent curse as they paused at the ford of a wide but shallow stream. A man can face death when he knows he is going to have some chance to fight back, even though he will lose. But this kind of an end was different.

He thought of that "Jay" the Colonel had mentioned, tried to place him in the picture. But he couldn't figure out who the man was.

The Colonel himself spoke up as they watered their ponies. "You see, Trumbo, I figure I got a right to demand a piece of this dinero you got in the stage holdup."

"Yeah?" said Val without interest.

"Sure. I've been the gent who's been engineering the holdup of those stages for quite a while. That guard with the mule-skinner has the gamblin' fever in his veins. A lunkhead. Beating him is hardly any fun. And he owes me a heap. It ain't never been no trouble, when the stage stops off at Loretto, on the way to Tolcross, to pour a few snorts of redeye into him and find out anything I like. And to warn him, also, at what spot on the way, to keep his guns penned."

"Oh," said the ex-deputy as they moved on.

"Sure," said the Colonel. "Now, you see, I guess. You sorta crowded in on my range, Trumbo. Though how you knew—when I didn't—that that mine payroll was going in a couple days ahead of time—well, you must uh been a heap smart."

"Reckon so," said Gordon as he realized what the information meant. Were he still a lawman it would have been mighty important to him.

"Of course, you had that Jay fella working on the inside for you."

"Uh-huh," said Val. Again he wondered who this "Jay" was, but everything was dreamy in his mind. Dimly he was aware that he was slumping over the saddle horn.

A quirt was laid across his back, Again. Then again. It brought him back to consciousness. And he saw that it was the Colonel who was lashing him to keep him awake. Gordon swore and twisted around in the saddle as he yanked at one of his shellless weapons. Then he propped his eyelids wider and saw Little Dan smirking at him over a drawn gun with hammer eared back. And Val remembered where he was and the position he was in. He ground his teeth and straightened and looked around. The sun was in the western half of the sky and he realized it was afternoon.

"I got a hunch we're being trailed," the baby-faced Colonel said once. "I

got a hunch." He led the way up a weed-grown barely perceptible fork that branched off from the main trail. An hour later they came to a rundown ranch, its bunkhouse caved in at one corner. When the seedy-looking little wisp of a gray-headed man appeared from around in the rear, the ex-deputy recalled the place. In trying to backtrail the road agents in one of the stage holdups, he had come here, almost certain the fugitives had been that way. But the meek-seeming owner, Adams, professed complete ignorance in his whining voice. The man's very mildness had convinced Gordon then he was too scared to ever get mixed up with outlaws.

Now he saw that he had been wrong. The Colonel and Adams greeted each other like old friends. They conferred off from Val a few moments. Then Gordon was heaved down from the saddle. Little Dan and the gambler took him in the back of the ramshackle place. Meanwhile, Adams mounted one of the trio's horses and, leading the other two, went on up the wooded valley. It was about a half hour later when he came in the back door himself and said their trail simply petered out further up the way. The ponies were now back in a thicket in the rear.

The Colonel let out a sigh of relief and told Adams to set up some drinks. "Wouldn't want your old pards catching up to us, Trumbo," he said. "You know, they might handle you real rough—not like us."

"Uh-huh. Not like us," Little Dan said with a guffaw, perched on a stool against the wall of the kitchen as he guarded the captive.

Adams rustled up some greasy grub, pulling shades of sacking across the kitchen windows as dusk came. They had some more drinks after coffee. Val Gordon felt some strength begin to creep back into his frame. He feigned drowsiness as the Colonel talked. But there never was a chance to make a play; Little Dan was an efficient watchdog whose alertness never relaxed.

"Trumbo," the Colonel said with that soft smile that was actually so cold-blooded, "we'll be getting to Tolcross late tomorrow sometime. I wouldn't want you to make the mistake of trying to double-cross me. Me, I want to be fair. You'll get your half of that cached dinero when you lead me to it; but if you try any tricks—" He indicated Little Dan with a nod. "You'd hate to be around when he got really rough, amigo."

Gordon shrugged. "When we find the dinero, you'll get yours, Colonel."

"And it would be an awful mistake for you to pretend you couldn't find it, Trumbo."

VAL MERELY shrugged again as he struck the fresh-rolled quirly between his swollen lips and hunted for a match. He went into a side pocket, pulled out a couple. With them came a handful of bills including a couple of twenties. Gordon saw wispy Adams' eyes rivet on them hungrily. A spark of hope leaped in the ex-deputy. The Colonel had his face in a tin cup; Little Dan was behind him. Val flattened out the bills slowly then shot Adams a glance with lifted eyebrows, questioning mutely. Adams caught it. He tongued his bloodless lips, put his eyes on the money again, then winked quickly.

The Colonel yawned and said they would be turning in. And Val's newly roused hopes fell. The kitchen table was shoved aside and Adams dragged away the piece of matting. Gordon saw then why he had been unable to find trace of anybody when he stopped there before. There was an unsuspected dirt cellar beneath the place. A trap door was lifted open.

"Take Mr. Trumbo downstairs, Dan," the Colonel ordered.

Little Dan beckoned as Adams stood close with a lantern. Then Dan led the the way down the narrow stairs, half holding the still shaky Gordon. Half-

way down, guffawing, the giant let him go. And the weakened Val plunged to the hard-packed dirt floor below. He lay there, half unconscious again, vaguely aware he was in a small underground room. And the only way out of it was up through the trap door. He heard it slam over him and the table being dragged back.

"A nice hole for our smart fox," the Colonel said above. "He ain't a-going to double-cross me."

The next thing Gordon remembered was to find himself shivering on the damp earth. Outside the wind soughed and it was very still in the house. He sat up, realizing he had fallen asleep. After a moment he caught snoring from above. Grimly he reared himself erect. Instinct told him this was his last chance. His chance to escape from a dead man's boots, to get out of the role of being a gunman's ghost. When he started to move he discovered he was a lot stronger.

He crept up the rickety set of stairs, pushed tentatively against the trap door. It didn't budge. He tongued his lips and tapped softly on the under side. Again. The moments seemed to stretch into timelessness. Then there was the faint scrape of a bolt being shoved back. Gordon plucked out one of his empty guns. He wouldn't have much chance in that position. Still less if it turned out to be Little Dan atop the trap. With his other hand he drew the wad of money from his pocket.

THE DOOR in the floor above was inched open cautiously. Peering up Val looked into the avid face of the crouched Adams. Adams had a Bowie knife half lifted in his hand. "Yes?" he said. The Colonel's snore came from a bunk in the front room of the place.

Gordon worked fast. Reholstering his useless Colts, he struck a match to reveal the money he clutched. Adams nodded quickly and snatched it. Then he tilted the door back against the Val Gordon would have no scruples table leg and motioned the prisoner out.

"I'll need a horse," Val said, still wary of a trap. He didn't see how Adams was going to explain his disappearance to the Colonel come morning. Adams nodded. And Gordon crept out and straightened in the kitchen.

Then he took control in the dimness. He shot forward an arm and snatched the gun from Adams' waistband. It felt good to have a loaded weapon. Adams snorted and clutched at his shirt front as he jerked back. He stuffed it back in hurriedly as a few bills fell half out, his fingers grabbing at them greedily. It puzzled Val but he wasted no time on that then.

"The horse?" he demanded, earing back the gun hammer.

"In the shed straight back up the slope," Adams husked.

It seemed almost too good to be true. Then he realized he had the jump on the pair who had held him captive. He could go into that front room and jump them and—

The Colonel's voice came from the front. "That you back there, Adams?"

Adams darted over and closed the trap door quickly and pulled the table back over it. "Yep. Just moseying 'round."

"All right. Dan's upstairs?"

"I'm up here, boss," Little Dan called down. "You want something?"

"Nope. Adams, bring me in a drink. I can't sleep none," the Colonel answered.

Val realized his chance of jumping them was gone, especially with the pair split, and the Colonel sitting up. Adams motioned him frantically. Gordon slipped out the door into the wan moonlight. The door closed behind him and the house was as blank as ever. He tried to run across the clearing but wobbled with stiffness. His game now was to get clear, get in touch with the Law, and round up the pair. If they could be made to talk—and

about the methods he employed on them—he might be cleared of the charge of having a hand in that hold-up. The Colonel knew the dead Trumbo had staged the job. Then—

He was hustling toward the fringe of trees on the slope, Adams' gun gripped in his hand. And he saw the first figure stir in the shadows. He half whirled and a twig snapped on his left and he saw another hombre taking form out of the night.

"Don't make a play, Trumbo," Speller called in the darkness of the trees. "You're a dead buzzard."

Gordon was ready to go down in gunsmoke sooner than be captured as the dead Trumbo again. He cursed hoarsely and levelled his gun at Speller's form. A third one, Towhead, closed in slightly from the right and rear. Half crouched, Val slammed that trigger. There was only the hollow click of the hammer on an empty shell. He heard Speller's sly chuckle.

"Don't try, Trumbo," Speller advised as he walked right at him, own gun dangling from his hand. "Adams sold you out good; he's a heap smart snake."

In a blind rage, Val Gordon rode that trigger twice more. And it was in vain. The snaky Adams had seen to it the gun was emptied. He had staged his triple-cross to perfection. Leaping, Gordon tried to slash out and batter his way free. But Towhead leaped from behind like a cat, struck him once on his wound-bloated shoulder with a gun barrel, then caught him a glancing blow over the back of the head. It was enough, though, to send Val to his knees. Speller completed the job by stepping in and striking him hard alongside the jaw. Gordon's senses swirled.

It was all done in comparative silence, no shot fired. Val was dimly aware of being lifted under the shoulders. Of being half carried as they made their way up the slope to where the ponies of the outlaws were ground-anchored. There were four horses too.

"That Adams demanded a fat price—but he worked it perfectly," Speller said. "Soon we'll have a little parley with our old pard, Trumbo, here. And he takes us to that cached dinero—or draws a one-way ticket to Boothill!"

- 6 -

THAT parley was held in the back-room of a little crossroads bar a couple of hours later. They dumped a few slugs of red-eye into the hollow-eyed Val Gordon and Speller laid the cards on the table.

Gordon made one last effort to convince them he was not Trumbo. But they laughed in his face. They knew Val Gordon was dead and buried back in Trigger Hill; that was all there was to it.

"Stop trying to run a busted bluff, Trumbo. You had the smart plan so's we all could get clear after that hold-up. We was to split up and every man fog it out on his own. Then we was to meet afterward and you would lead us to the dinero you had taken back in the hills to your pard, Jay."

"Jay?" said Gordon, baffled again by that name.

Speller lifted an arm as if to strike him. "Don't try to play the jughead, Trumbo. You know Jay, all right. The gent who was working with you from the inside; the one who knew the dinero was going to come through early. You never would tell us much about him, Trumbo. But we know. He knows where the dinero is too—was in with you on the double-cross. So—"

It came to Gordon then. The only ones who knew the mine pay roll was going through early were the Tolcross sheriff, Barles, and his staff. The staff meant he himself and the other depu-

ty, J. T. Stephens. J. T.—Jay. That last was the way his brother deputy's initial would be pronounced.

Val sucked in his breath. Though he had no evidence, it was plain enough. J. T. Stephens was the double-crosser; Stephens, who had accused him of being it! It was Stephens who had worked with Trumbo, who had met him up in the hills when he was supposed to be trying to hunt down those rustlers. By pointing the finger of suspicion at him, Gordon, Stephens had removed himself from the picture. It had been clever of him to say he had seen Val returning to the fork of the draws from the direction of the spot where the holdup had taken place.

Then Gordon recalled something else. That friend who had come to him in the night to warn him a mob was coming for him had mentioned another point. He said some of the cooler heads were sloping out to the Burro Hills to see if Stephens' charge could be corroborated. They had ridden out to see if they could find Val's tracks as he returned, as charged, from the holdup.

Gordon quickly put two and two together. If they had not found such tracks, Stephens' story would have been proven a lie. The posse would have been so informed and the manhunt would have been over. But it had not happened that way. They had found tracks. And now, Jim Gordon could figure out whose tracks they had been. Trumbo's. He had met Stephens at the fork of the draws in the Burro Hills. Had had the pay roll from the stage when he did meet him.

"Well, Trumbo?" Speller prodded, shining his ready Colts with his shirt sleeve.

"Guess you got me," Val said slowly, nodding sadly. But he had already seen his one chance. He knew that country through the Burro Hills like a man would his own backyard; he had scoured it many times when he was a younker. And he had not forgotten that little cave tucked away some feet up in the thickets at the entrance to the left draw. It was on its side wall.

It was a thousand-to-one shot, but there was a chance that Trumbo and Stephens had secreted the mine payroll dinero in it. It was a logical place. Stephens knew that country like the palm of his hand, too. It was a long chance, but it was the only one Gordon had.

Speller rapped the table so the empty glasses rattled. "You pay us off—lead us to that dinero, Trumbo—or we're paying you off in lead! Pronto too!"

Val Gordon nodded. "All right. It never was my idea, anyways, the double-cross. Maybe Jay could answer some questions about that."

"Who is Jay?" Towhead demanded.

"J. T. Stephens, deputy sheriff at Tolcross. I'll lead you to the cache, but I want him there, too; I got a score to settle with him."

"That's your deal?" Speller said.

Val nodded grimly. "One of you can slip into Tolcross and pass him the word. Tell him to be at the cache tomorrow night—after midnight. We should get there some time about then."

Speller stood up. "All right. Let's cover more ground. But if you try a trick, Trumbo, and don't show us that dinero—" He waved his gun. "All the dinero in the land, Trumbo, ain't worth hot lead in the guts!"

IT WAS the next night. All four of them were saddle-weary, their garb sweat-stained. They had pushed hard. Speller and his mates were lobos, wanted men; they had had to avoid the main trails and go around settlements. On top of that had been the delay while Towhead slipped into Tolcross and got the word to J. T. Stephens. Now they moved steadily upward through the broken country of the Burro Hills. Speller seldom had his hand away from a gun butt as he rode behind Gordon watchfully.

Towhead got an idea. "Say, Trum-

bo, maybe you tried to outslick us again," he called angrily as they followed a faint winding trail. "Sending me in to pass the word to Stephens... Yeah. Maybe he knows a shorter way in here. He could hustle up and git the cached dinero and duck out and—"

Speller cursed hotly and bawled at Gordon to spur on faster. Speller plied the quirt to his own tired horse. "If you've tried that Trumbo—well, don't say I didn't warn you!"

Val Gordon was calm as he pushed along faster. The shouting was exactly what he wanted. And his hopes rose as he glanced back once from a bald knoll. He was almost certain he had glimpsed a couple of riders further back down the trail. He wanted every last one of those coyotes in on this showdown. Of course, if the payroll money wasn't in that cave—

They went down a short slope, rounded a huge chunk of outcropping rock. And they faced the two draws that forked off deeper into the hills. "This is it," he said quietly, dropping to the ground.

They bunched close around him. "Remember, your hoglegs are empty, Trumbo," Towhead said. His voice was hot and eager at the thought of getting his share of that dinero at last. "Where is it?"

"You come with me," Gordon told him. "Ain't room for a whole pack to go swarming in."

"Sing out if anything happens," Speller told the light-haired man. "And he won't ride out here alive. Keep him covered!"

Val walked into the entrance to the little draw on the left, veered over toward the brush-grown wall. The little path he remembered as a boy was almost obliterated. But he found it and began to climb at a tangent up the wall of the draw, Towhead panting behind him. Briars clutched and tore at them. They had to push through matted underbrush. When they armed aside foliage splotches of moonlight flooded through.

"I got the trigger cocked, Trumbo," Towhead warned.

"Hope you don't trip," Gordon said laconically.

THERE was a sharp whistle below. Speller drifted over toward a tree trunk. And the rider emerged from the timber, two guns spiking from his hands. It was J. T. Stephens, Gordon's former fellow deputy.

"It's me—Jay," Stephens called.

"All right," Speller said. "Come on but don't try no tricks. Trumbo's going for the dinero now!"

Val Gordon's heart leaped. The appearance of Stephens here was almost conclusive proof the dinero was cached at this spot. But there was a chance it might not be in the cave.

"Keep moving," Towhead said, prodding Gordon's back with the gun muzzle.

The flat-bodied ex-deputy jerked his sombrero lower quickly so Stephens wouldn't recognize him at once. He summoned every last source of strength in his body. This was the showdown.

A few more strides and he emerged on the earth shelf that passed unnoticed from below. Pressing through scrub growth, he bent aside a small sapling, kicked aside grass, and revealed the mouth of a little cave. He had to stoop to enter.

"I'll be waiting right here," Towhead said.

Gordon's breath caught in his throat as he pushed further in, dropped to hands and knees as the cave grew smaller. Then one of his probing hands rang against metal. The next moment he tugged out a compact metal box in the very rear of the cave. He backed until he could turn, moved toward the cave mouth again.

He saw Towhead's spread legs out there in the moonlight. And in the glow that seeped into the cave he noted that the lock of the box had

been forced. He pried it open. Rows of greenbacks were neatly stacked inside. Val smiled grimly and moved toward the ledge.

"Here!" he said sharply to Towhead, pushing the open box at him. Towhead's eyes bugged from his head. His avarice betrayed him as he lunged and grabbed at it.

"You got it?" Speller yelled from below.

And Val Gordon struck at the momentarily off-guard Towhead. He slammed him back against the earth wall beside the cave entrance. And the next second, Val had wrenched the gun from Towhead's hand and had yanked the other one from his cartridge belt.

WITH A scream, Towhead dropped the box into the undergrowth. But the desperate Gordon faced with a chance to turn the tables at last, was too quick for him. He kicked him savagely in the left shin, then ripped open his face with a blow of one gun barrel. A push finished it and Towhead toppled backward to go plunging down the side of the draw through the undergrowth. Two slugs tore into the foliage just to the right of Gordon's head.

He knew he was a perfect target up there in the moonlight; and if he retreated into that cave, he would be trapped. But he had his last ace ready. With a crazy scream, he grabbed a handful of those bound-up bills and threw them forward. They went fluttering down into the draw, shiny and green and lush in the moonlight.

Stephens shouted and waved at Gordon up there on the ledge. But that double-crosser's greed was too much for him to resist too. He saw the other man with Speller rush out and grab up a bunch of bills. Then Stephens was out of the saddle and scrambling for a big wad of the money that had fallen in one chunk. Speller took another shot at Gordon, then started forward toward the downpour of currency himself.

Another gun crashed on the night. Hot lead seared Val's left arm, but flung himself sideward as he saw the Colonel come leaping down from the trees of the slope. Right at his heels galloped big Little Dan.

"Git away there!" the Colonel screamed at the others. "I'll salivate you all if you—" Speller whirled and triggered at him.

And up on the ledge, Val Gordon loosed another big batch of the dinero. Followed it quickly with a fresh handful of tens.

They went crazy below, shrieking and darting about as each man tried to get his share, slamming lead hurriedly at Gordon and then scooting over toward another handful of the down-drifting dinero. Little Dan ran up on Stephens and dropped him stiff with a single hammerlike blow. Then he bent to scoop up the money Stephens had collected.

Gordon heaved the whole box high so that it upended and a fresh rain of green currency drifted down. Then he dropped behind the scant protection of a clump of bush and answered the lead from below. He sent Speller's partner down with a slug that smashed his thigh. Just missed Speller himself by inches.

IT WAS the cold-blooded cool-headed Colonel who got his senses first. He wadded bills into a pocket of his gray frock coat and dived for a log to answer Val Gordon's fire. But Val's right gun spoke with a wink of orange-slashed flame a split second too soon. The Colonel went down, rolling over and over, clutching at the right side of his chest. Gordon swung his gun to cover Speller who was behind a tree again.

Too late the ex-lawman saw Little Dan, drawing a gun, dash in close to the draw wall, diving into the undergrowth and out of sight. One of Spel-

ler's slugs ripped through Val's hat crown. Acting on a split-second decision, he sank to his knees, howling as if mortally hit. The ruse worked. Speller darted from behind the tree to get in closer. Gordon's gun splashed flame color on the night again. And Speller went to his knees, screaming like an animal, gun gone, blood running over his hand, his forearm shattered by Gordon's crack shot.

The former deputy rose to his feet. And he saw Little Dan loom like a human mountain at the end of the ledge. The brute laughed mirthlessly and raced toward him, triggering as he came.

Val spread his legs to draw bead and let go the thumbed-back hammer. Again he was caught with an empty gun, having spent his final shell. It looked as if he were trapped. One of Little Dan's slugs nicked his cheek. "Trumbo!" he barked as he closed.

GORDON had but one chance. He lunged forward right at that frothing gun. And he beat frantically with his own bulletless weapon. Seven, eight times he brought that gun barrel chopping down. Dan's weapon sagged from his fingers. Blood showering down over his face, the human hulk brought his hands around to Val's throat. Breath locked in his battered body, Gordon struck once more with that gun.

And Little Dan's hands loosened. His eyes turned upward in his head. He fell back half a step, turned and staggered forward off the ledge. Gordon dropped to his knees. And Stephens, who had recovered from Little Dan's punch, sang out from below: "Don't move, Val! I got you covered dead to rights!"

He stood with his gun arm steadied over a sapling limb. He couldn't miss, was a dead shot anyway. "Only one man is walking outa here alive tonight—one who won't do no talking," he said. "So long, Val. I'll—"

"Freeze in your tracks!" It was the white-headed Barles, aged Tolcross sheriff. He had emerged from the woods of the slope, two men flanking him. All had levelled guns.

Stephens looked back over his shoulder, swore hoarsely, then let his own gun fall to the grass as he stepped back, hands climbing.

"I been suspecting Stephens ever since he accused you, Val," Barles called. "Been tailin' him right close. So we followed him tonight when he slipped outa town. And we heard and seen enough to know you just proved your own innocence, Val. Take it easy. One of the boys'll be right up to help you down."

Val Gordon sleeved his powder-smirched face, grinning weakly as he gazed down at the bills strewn along the draw.

"But you was supposed to be shot and killed over at Trigger Hill, Val?" the sheriff added puzzledly as he advanced.

"Maybe I been walking in a dead man's boots, Barles—but I'll gunwhip the next gent who tries to convince me I'm a ghost," Gordon yelled back wearily.

★

Another Exciting Novelet by Harlan Clay

POWDERSMOKE RANSOM

is in the April issue of

REAL WESTERN STORIES

THE TRADING POST

Department of Special Features

California or Bust!

by Harold Gluck

JOHN AUGUSTUS SUTTER was a remarkable man with a dream; he was going to build a little empire for himself in California. The discovery by James W. Marshall of some metallic flakes that turned out to be gold wrecked that dream, but it created dreams in the hearts of people all over the world. For California was the new Utopia. Gold, gold, gold, just for the asking and taking; it seemed as simple as that.

The problem was to get to California. There were many overland routes, and variations on these routes, but the one followed by the largest number of gold seekers was the famous Oregon-

California Road. And so they started by wagons to reach their destiny on the Pacific coast.

One of the commonest mistakes made by the emigrants was that of overburdening themselves with equipment and provisions. This wore down their oxen or horses, slowed their passage, and sooner or later ended in abandonment along the way.

We know a lot about that westward march, because there were people who kept records. Some, years later, wrote stories—subject to all the tricks that memory can play. We are going to listen to part of a record written by Reuben Cole Shaw. He joined in the gold rush to California in the hope of bettering his fortune. He remained there two years and then returned east to his family. You get the feeling of realism from what he has to say, because he was there in person. So pull up your chair and turn the television off as Reuben takes you back to Young America on its westward march. The wagon train is now en route.

His voice is a bit feeble, but here he goes:

BENJAMIN SNOW, an excellent shot and a persistent hunter, was off for the hills long before daylight on a still-hunt for buffalo. Before our train was ready for the road, he returned and reported the capture of a fine cow only a short distance away. My mess was detailed to go with Snow and secure the meat. There were seven of us in the party; and, in addition to our riding-animals, we took along four pack-mules with game pouches, having had orders to take the meat to our noon halting place.

A mile up the road and a short distance into the hills brought us to the game. We were but a short time divesting our prize of its jacket and packing everything eatable on the mules, being anxious to overtake our train as soon as possible, for fear of being cut off from the company by the hostile Sioux.

Turner, one of our party, was detailed to hold the horses and keep a sharp lookout, as we always had done when in detached parties. When we were ready to leave, Turner, who was posted on a small hillock, called our attention to a number of moving objects some distance back in the sandhills. He had noticed them for some time, but, thinking they might be buffaloes, had the good judgment to say nothing about the matter until the mules were securely packed. A hasty observation convinced us that an army of mounted Indians were coming towards us as fast as their ponies could bring them. They were, perhaps, a half-mile away; being enveloped in a cloud of dust, it was hard to estimate their number, but we thought there were at least three hundred of them.

We mounted our horses at once and forced the pack-mules to their best pace, being anxious to get from the hills into the river bottom before being overtaken by the three hundred Sioux warriors. The main road up the river at this point lay along the bluffs, and we thought our train would not be far in advance of the point where we should strike it. Before we were quite out of the hills, the Indians announced their presence by yelling like a pack of devils, which frightened the horses and was the means of increasing their speed. The pack-mules did not seem to be at all impressed with the importance of the occasion; but, by the vigorous use of the ramrods from our guns, we held them to time, kept them in the lead and saved the beef.

After such observations in the rear as we were able to make, we became satisfied that the whole three hundred Indians were coming down on us like a whirlwind. They were but a short distance in our rear when we reached the valley, but here we had the good fortune to find ourselves within forty rods of six of our men, who had been detained by re-packing their mules.

Being in the near vicinity of six well-

armed comrades and having a good view of our train slowly moving up the valley but a short distance away, gave us much courage; but what put courage in us took it out of the Indians.

Having recovered from our fright and seeing the Indians hesitating, we wheeled around and brought our guns to bear for fight, but they took the back track in good earnest. Whether they would have harmed us had they gotten hold of us they knew best, of course, but we had no disposition to test the matter.

When we became the pursuers and the Indians the pursued, their numbers seemed to have diminished amazingly, for we could count only about fifteen Indians. Whatever became of the other two hundred and eighty-five I never knew. The General said he would wager a beaver tail that there had not been over a dozen Indians within ten miles of us; but, of course, we knew better.

ON JULY 8th I had an opportunity of gratifying my desire to capture at least one buffalo, for I was then one of the hunters. Exchanging my Spanish saddle-mule for a horse said to be a leader in the chase, we were off before sunrise, and in a short time sighted a large herd of buffaloes quietly grazing on the river bottom. They were estimated to be four miles away, but in the clear atmosphere of that locality they seemed much nearer. We managed to keep out of their sight until within a mile of them, when they threw up their heads and were soon in rapid motion for the hills. We thought to cut them off by taking advantage of the ground, but they beat us to the bluffs and for a short time were out of sight in a perfect labyrinth of low sandhills, among which they scattered in all directions.

It would have been useless to attempt to estimate the number of animals in the herd, for they occupied three or four miles of the river bottom, yet it

[*Turn Page*]

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seemed but a few minutes from the time those nearest us became aware of our presence until every buffalo had gained the bluffs and was lost to view. Our horses became excited and did their best to overtake the fleeing herd. Each hunter selected his route and we were soon out of sight of one another.

An immense cloud of dust hung over the landscape and a buffalo could hardly be distinguished thirty yards away, while numerous washouts, or gullies, made rapid riding both difficult and dangerous.

Back in the hills a mile or two I found myself within twenty yards of the game, and, raising my gun, I fired at the nearest buffalo. The animal didn't fall, but I did. At the report of the gun my horse (not being accustomed to firearms) became terribly frightened and changed his course very suddenly, leaving me in a heap on the hard, gravelly earth.

The fall resulted in my being considerably bruised and shaken up, but not otherwise injured. My clothing received some gaping rents, while my canteen was crushed into a shapeless mass and completely ruined. I was pleased, however, to find that my gun had passed through the ordeal without material injury.

The frightened horse took the back track at once, carrying with him my ammunition and small arms, and leaving me with a empty gun to get out of the hills as best I could. Slowly and sorrowfully I walked back to the valley, where I found my horse and joined the other hunters; and thus ended my first and last buffalo hunt.

Here I learned that not a buffalo had been taken from that vast herd, and that two other hunters, as well as myself, had been unhorsed in the grand chase. This ended buffalo hunting on horseback by our party, and we understood what the General meant when he told us at starting out, that without limited experience and want of trained horses we would be more likely to return from the chase with broken heads than a dead buffalo.

The outcome of this exploit was very disappointing; but as the prospect of adventure was a great incentive to our crossing the plains, we had no right to complain when finding some things quite disagreeable.

EARLY in the morning of July 20th we bade a final adieu to the Platte, and, after a long day's march across a dry region, struck the Sweetwater river an hour or two after dark at a point about one thousand miles from the frontier and seven thousand feet above the level of the sea.

The Sweetwater is a tributary of the Platte, taking its rise in the neighboring mountains where it is fed by melting snow. Its clear, cool water—which was highly appreciated by our party after having so long used the turbid waters of the Platte—and the broad valley which afforded splendid grazing for our animals, with large quantities of driftwood which furnished fuel for cooking, and the grand view of distant mountains, besides other interesting objects near by, combined to make it a camping place at which we would have liked to remain for a week.

The country traversed for the preceding two weeks was rough and rugged. After crossing the north fork of the Platte, we had long stretches of dry, barren plains, vast fields of wild sage, scraggy hills, deep and rocky ravines, and miles of volcanic rocks and ashes. The dust from the ashes was very annoying to both man and beast. Nearly all of the men had their lips covered with courtplaster, while their inflamed noses and eyes showed the effects of the vicious alkaline dust.

We lost two mules in crossing the north fork of the Platte, besides three which became exhausted and were left in the barren hills. It seemed that we were out of the range of the buffalo, and, though a number of deer taken

[*Turn To Page* 84]

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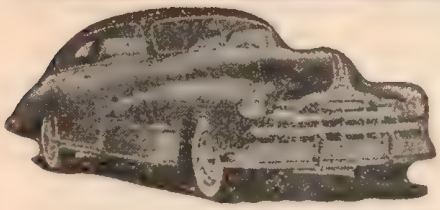

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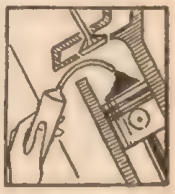

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☐ Send C.O.D. I will pay postman on delivery plus a few cents postage. If I do not see immediate improvement, if after even 30 days' use I am not completely satisfied that I have gotten improved Pep, pickup, performance and economy for my car, I may return the empty tubes for prompt refund of the full purchase price.

☐ I enclose payment. Modern Mart will pay postage. Same Money Back Guarantee.

Name .....

Address .....

City ..... State .....

Get Rid of UGLY PIMPLES

THIS NEW EASY WAY!

Amazing new medicated lotion developed by a doctor works wonders by clearing up skin blemishes in one week or less!

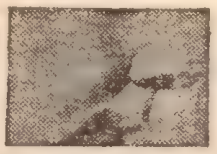
Doesn't Show On Your Face

DON'T let a bad complexion ruin romances, spoil your fun, cause you to be embarrassed, shy or ashamed. If you suffer from acne, the common external cause of pimples among young people, try this wonderfully effective medicated lotion that was developed by a practicing physician to clear up his own teen ager's complexion after other methods had failed. It has produced astonishing results for many thousands of others. It is GUARANTEED to help you or it won't cost you a single cent!

Keraplex is a skin-colored lotion (NOT a greasy salve or ointment!) that is quickly absorbed by the skin and gets right down in the pores where its healing and antiseptic ingredients can go to work. After you have applied it, there is no trace left on the surface. In fact, it makes a perfect powder base...actually improves the tone of the skin! It is pleasant and easy to use—leaving your skin soft, clean and fragrant.

BEFORE

Note more than a dozen blemishes on just one side of this boy's face before KERAPLEX was applied.



AFTER

Same boy had used KERAPLEX twice a day for only 5 days when above photo was taken. Note the amazing improvement.

NO COST Unless It ACTUALLY Does Clear Up Your Skin!

An analysis of results, taken from the "case history" records, indicates that Keraplex is successful in clearing up six out of seven cases of externally caused pimples and blemishes.

What Users Say:

"I was suffering from a severe case of acne . . . and with only 4 days' treatment with Keraplex . . . was completely relieved."—P. S.

"I have been completely satisfied with your lotion to help clear up the pimples on my face."
—K. W.

"I have been using Keraplex for a severe case of eczema on my hands, knees and elbows. Now my skin is completely clear."—A. M. B.

Girls often suffer from acne, too. So if you have a sister or friend who needs help, show her this advertisement. She'll be grateful to you later for the kindness you have shown.

Mail the convenient coupon below now, for a bottle of Keraplex. Then use it as directed for a full week. If you don't SEE results that delight you within that time, simply return empty bottle and your money will be refunded at once. Don't delay a single minute. Clip and mail the coupon NOW. Underwood Laboratories, Inc., Dept. 17, Stratford, Conn.

MONEY-BACK GUARANTEE

UNDERWOOD LABORATORIES, Inc., Dept. 17
STRATFORD, CONN.

Yes! I want to try Keraplex ON APPROVAL. Send size checked below in plain wrapper marked "personal." When it is delivered I will deposit with postman amount indicated below, plus postage. If not delighted with the RESULTS, I will return empty bottle within seven days for a full refund of the purchase price.

☐ Regular Size, $1.98
☐ Double Quantity (Two Bottles), $3.50

Name .....

Address .....

City ..... Zone ..... State .....

☐ SAVE POSTAGE. Check here if you ENCLOSE payment, in which case we pay postage. Same money-back Guarantee applies!

Payment must be sent with all orders to be shipped to A.P.O.'s, Canada and foreign countries.

along the water-courses added something to our bill of fare, we drew largely on our regular supplies.

Wild sage (artemisia) is a small shrub from one to six feet high. It is found from the British possessions on the north to Mexico on the south. It delights in dry, sandy plains and gravelly hillsides, but is shy of river bottoms and rich soils. In color it resembles the common garden sage, and exhales an agreeable odor. It furnished travelers with the means of cooking when no other fuel could be had; it also relieved the desert country of much of its monotony.

On striking the steep and rocky hills, nearly all wagon companies found their wagons overloaded, and, in order to lighten them, such property as they could best spare was left along the road. On our march through the foothills we passed many abandoned wagons, also chains, ropes, saddles, shovels, spades, picks, gold-washers, crow-bars, and a complete outfit for a saw-mill.

Our pack-mules were losing flesh and showing signs of failure; in order to relieve them, our tents were thrown aside as surplus plunder, and we slept in the open air. Many other useless articles were left at different points. A large auger, with a very elaborate extension stem—with which we had intended to prospect the lower regions to any desired depth for the yellow metal—was left in the foothills, and a lot of sheet-iron gold-washers—made for the purpose of separating large quantities of gold from the shining sands—found a resting place on the Platte River, Either of the above would have been about as useful in a gold mine as a Texas steer in a china shop.

ROCK INDEPENDENCE was near our camp. The granite pile, being isolated and arising from a level plain, is a landmark of enormous proportions and quite worthy to stand as a sentinel

[*Turn To Page* 86]

Reducing Specialist Says: **LOSE WEIGHT** Where It Shows Most **REDUCE** MOST ANY PART OF THE BODY WITH

ELECTRIC Spot Reducer

Spot Reducer

Relaxing • Soothing Penetrating Massage

UNDERWRITERS LABORATORY APPROVED

FOR GREATEST BENEFIT IN REDUCING by massage use spot REDUCER with or without electricity—Also used as an aid in the relief of pains for which massage is indicated.

Take pounds off—keep slim and trim with Spot Reducer! Remarkable new invention which uses one of the most effective reducing methods employed by masseurs and turkish baths—MASSAGE!

TAKE OFF EXCESS WEIGHT!

Don't Stay FAT—You Can LOSE POUNDS and INCHES SAFELY Without Risking HEALTH

LIKE a magic wand, the "Spot Reducer" obeys your every wish. Most any part of your body where it is loose and flabby, wherever you have extra weight and inches, the "Spot Reducer" can aid you in acquiring a youthful, slender and graceful figure. The beauty of this scientifically designed Reducer is that the method is so simple and easy, the results quick, sure and harmless. No exercises or strict diets. No steambaths, drugs or laxatives.

With the SPOT REDUCER you can now enjoy the benefits of RELAXING, SOOTHING massage in the privacy of your own home! Simple to use—just plug in, grasp handle and apply over most any part of the body—stomach, hips, chest, neck, thighs, arms, buttocks, etc. The relaxing, soothing massage breaks down FATTY TISSUES, tones the muscles and flesh, and the increased awakened blood circulation carries away waste fat—helps you regain and keep a firmer and more GRACEFUL FIGURE!

YOUR OWN PRIVATE MASSEUR AT HOME

When you use the Spot Reducer, it's almost like having your own private masseur at home. It's fun reducing this way! It not only helps you reduce and keep slim—but also aids in the relief of those types of aches and pains—and tired nerves that can be helped by massage! The Spot Reducer is handsomely made of light weight aluminum and rubber and truly a beautiful invention you will be thankful you own. AC 110 volts. Underwriters Laboratory approved.

MAIL THIS 10 DAY FREE TRIAL COUPON NOW!

TRY THE SPOT REDUCER 10 DAYS FREE IN YOUR OWN HOME!

Mail this coupon with only $1 for your Spot Reducer on approval. Pay postman $8.95 plus delivery—or send $9.95 (full price) and we ship postage prepaid. Use it for ten days in your own home. Then if not delighted return Spot Reducer for full purchase price refund. Don't delay! You have nothing to lose—except ugly, embarrassing, undesirable pounds of FAT. MAIL COUPON now!

ALSO USE IT FOR ACHES AND PAINS

CAN'T SLEEP:

Relax with electric Spot Reducer. See how soothing its gentle massage can be. Helps you sleep when massage can be of benefit.

MUSCULAR ACHES:

A handy helper for transient relief of discomforts that can be aided by gentle, relaxing massage.

LOSE WEIGHT OR NO CHARGE

USED BY EXPERTS

Thousands have lost weight this way — in hips, abdomen, legs, arms, necks, buttocks, etc. The same method used by stage, screen and radio personalities and leading reducing salons. The Spot Reducer can be used in your spare time, in the privacy of your own room.

ORDER IT TODAY!

SENT ON APPROVAL—MAIL COUPON NOW!

BODY MASSAGER CO., Dept. B-702
318 Market St., Newark, N. J.

Please send me the Spot Reducer for 10 days trial period. I enclose $1. Upon arrival I will pay postman only $8.95 plus postage and handling. If not delighted I may return SPOT REDUCER within 10 days for prompt refund of full purchase price.

☐ I enclose $12.95. Send DeLuxe Model.

Name .....

Address .....

City ..... State .....

☐ SAVE POSTAGE—check here if you enclose $9.95 with coupon. We pay all postage and handling charges. Same money back guarantee applies.

LOSE WEIGHT OR NO CHARGE

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write B.I.C. 143 Belmont St., Belmont, Mass.

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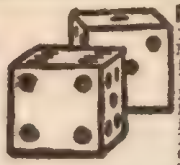

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Men afflicted with Bladder Trouble, Getting Up Nights, Pains in Back, Hips, Legs, Nervousness, Dizziness, Physical Inability and General Impotency send for our amazing FREE BOOK that tells how you may correct these conditions and have new health and Zest in Life. Write today. No Obligation.
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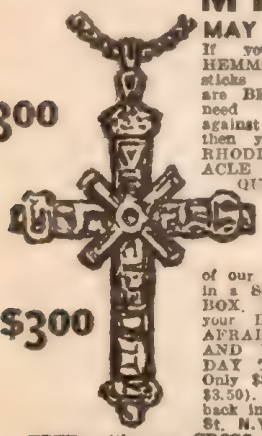

$300
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over the mountain peaks which are to be seen from its summit. It is nineteen hundred and fifty feet long and one hundred and twenty feet high, occupying twenty-one acres of ground; yet it is only one of the wonders, and quite in keeping with the immensity of objects to be found in that locality. Although having been surfeited with rocks for several days, we spent considerable time and enthusiasm in viewing the monster, which looked like it might be a mammoth egg half buried in the earth.

Two or three miles from our camp was the Devil's Gate, where the Sweetwater cut through a granite ridge. The length of the canyon is about twelve hundred feet and the width eighty feet, while the walls of solid rock were over four hundred feet high and appeared to be vertical; but this illusion was dispelled when, after climbing to the summit of the ridge, none of our party of four persons succeeded in throwing a stone across the yawning chasm.

Our camp was near the entrance of the famous South Pass through the Rocky Mountains, the road to which led in a southwest direction for about one hundred and forty miles to the summit, and then about the same distance in a northwest course to a point about due west.

On July 21st we remained in camp and were occupied in washing, mending our clothing and repairing our packs and saddles. While sitting around a bright campfire at the close of the day, the General informed us that he intended to leave the traveled road and take us through the Wind River Mountains, and strike the road on the other side of the main range, where it enters the Great Basin. We were not only surprised and delighted, but heartily endorsed the arrangement, as we felt assured that while on the short cut we would find an abundance of water, grass, fuel and game. We were to make

[*Turn To Page* 88]

CRASH THROUGH THE TIME BARRIER WITH THE "MADE SIMPLE" METHOD!

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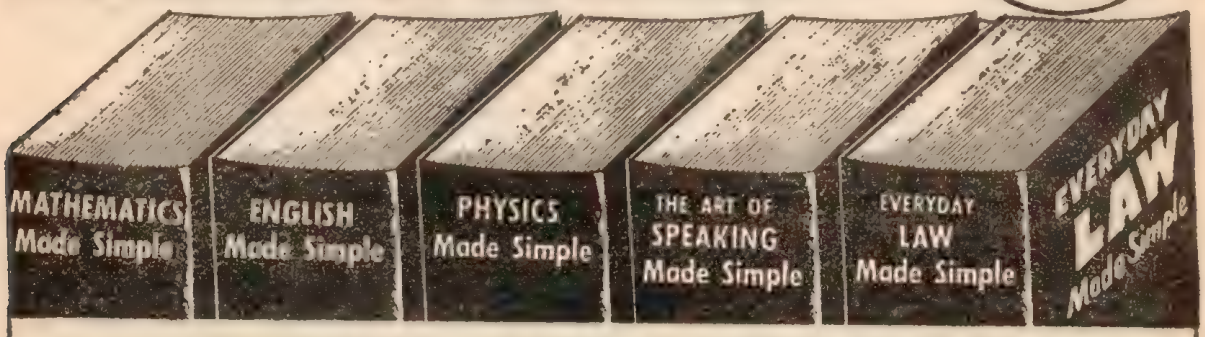

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Do you have that constant urge to write but fear that a beginner hasn't a chance? Then listen to what a famous editor said on this subject:

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the trip by easy marches, with the view of recruiting our animals and adding something to our stock of provision.

Our hunter, Benjamin Snow, had spent the greater part of twenty years of his life in hunting and trapping in the White mountains and forests of Maine. Loaded down with a rifle, two vicious-looking pistols, and a large knife, he could cover more ground in a given time than any mule in our outfit. He never hunted on horseback, claiming that he could secure more game by still-hunting than any ten mounted men, and no one could gainsay the fact.

Uncle Ben was about forty years of age, nearly six feet high, weighed one hundred and eighty pounds and built for heavy service from the ground up. He could neither read nor write, yet he possessed a lot of real practical common sense. Dressed in a gray suit, with unshaven face, long hair, and wide-visored, close fitting cap, he was an odd looking character. He was of a kind and amiable disposition, very companionable, and the narratives of his hunting exploits rendered him a welcome guest around our campfires. Some of his adventures when buffalo hunting on the plains are worthy of mention.

WHILE we were among the hills on the upper waters of the Platte, one morning about daylight, Uncle Ben mounted his mule and started west along the traveled road. Our train, having made about fifteen miles, halted for dinner on a small water-course, where, along the narrow, deep bottoms, were growing isolated patches of shrubs and dwarfed trees. Near the crossing, picketed in a grass plat, we found Uncle Ben's mule, and nearby, hanging from the branch of a small tree, was the carcass of a fine deer, from which steaks had been cut, while a smoldered campfire told where our hunter had

[*Turn To Page* 90]

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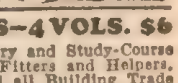

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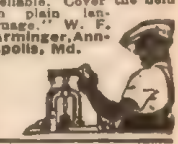

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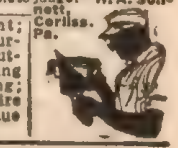

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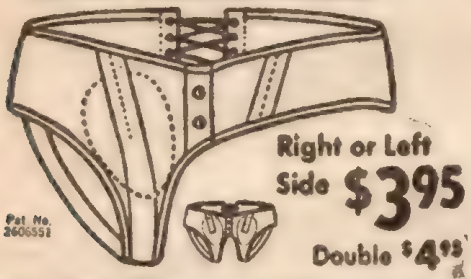

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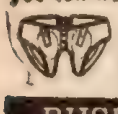

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cooked his dinner. A stake about four feet long was noticed in a conspicuous place, and in the split top, at right angles with the upright, had been placed a small stick, with the sharpened end pointing west.

After cooking and eating the venison for dinner, we took in Uncle Ben's mule and pushed on, encamping about dusk in a small valley, which afforded but little grass and a meager supply of water. Here we found Uncle Ben. He had killed a large buffalo, about four miles away, and was waiting for help to bring in the meat. There was not time to lose, for it was already a question as to who should secure the game, ourselves or the wolves. Hastily watering our horses, filling our canteens and snatching the game-pouches and beef-saw, ten of us, all mounted, were soon following Uncle Ben's lead over the hills. Darkness was coming on apace, a cold wind had sprung up from the west, angry-looking clouds were floating over mountain tops, and there was every indication of a cold and cheerless night.

Owing to the darkness and sameness of everything around us, there was some difficulty in locating the game; but we found it, picketed the animals in the best grass, dressed the beef, and from it cooked and ate our supper, after which we packed up and were off for the camp. It was very dark, and the wind, which increased in violence, was accompanied with dashes of rain. A sudden fall in temperature also added much to our discomfort. Shaping our course by the wind, which we still thought to be coming from the west, we plodded on; but, after traveling four or five hours and finding no camp, the conviction forced itself upon us that on a very dark and gloomy night we were lost in a wilderness. Finding ourselves in a valley, at the base of a high and rocky ridge which was too steep for horses to climb, we ascended it on foot,

[*Turn To Page* 92]

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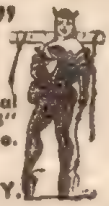
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but could see nothing of the fire which the boys in camp had promised to keep burning. We then discharged six guns in a volley, but could hear no responsive sound. It being past midnight, we returned to the valley, picketed the animals, selected a guard by drawing lots, posted the victim, and resigned ourselves to fate.

The wind was sweeping down the valley at a furious rate, and, as we could find no shelter from its force, we decided to build a windbreak from the mass of loose rocks at the foot of the hill; but the task had hardly been commenced when some one suggested that it was a good place for rattlesnakes, and moving the rocks might disturb them. We abandoned the scheme at once. Having no fuel with which to make a fire, and being frequently treated to squalls of snow and hail, together with the mournful howling of wolves which had scented our meat, we passed a miserable night.

At the dawn of day we again ascended the hill, which proved to be one of the highest in the vicinity, but we could not recognize any landmarks. The storm had spent its fury and through rifts in the clouds could be seen clear sky, and we were then able to locate the cardinal points, by which it was discovered that the wind was blowing from the north, and our ignorance of the change was the cause of all our misery. Instead of traveling south, as we should have done, we had taken a due westerly course, keeping parallel with the road and finally finding ourselves about eight miles nearer California than we cared to be that morning.

An hour's travel in a southerly direction brought us to the road, where, knowing that the company would not break camp until we were heard from, one of our party was selected by lot to go and inform the company of our safety. But a few minutes elapsed before the one chosen set out on his mis-

sion, after which we cooked and ate breakfast from the meat that had caused us so much trouble. Without waiting for the arrival of the company, we started west along the road, continuing until near noon, when we found water and halted, being joined by the company soon afterwards.

At another time Uncle Ben had killed a buffalo, two or three miles off the the road, but failed to get into camp and report the fact before night, and, as there were some doubts about finding the game in the darkness it was left till daylight the next morning, when eight men went out to where the game was left, but they found nothing except a part of the skin and the larger bones, the wolves having devoured every vestige of the meat.

The large mountain wolves prowled around our camp every night and treated us to the most unearthly, lonesome and homesick music that could be imagined. The only thing that would stop their infernal noise was the report of a gun, and then for only a few minutes. The brutes never came within reach of our muzzle-loaders in the daytime and were rarely seen at night.

NEAR NIGHTFALL on July 29th, we encamped on the Little Sandy River, a tributary of the Colorado. We had passed the divide and were on the waters that found their way to the Pacific Ocean. We were under the necessity of traveling at a very moderate gait and leading our mules single file, as the trail through rocky gorges and along steep hillsides allowed the passage of only one animal at a time, consequently we made the distance of only one hundred and ten miles from the Sweetwater in eight days.

We found in the mountains all the requisites of camp life in abundance. Game was plentiful and readily taken, though we had made no attempts as yet to prepare meat for future use. Our

[*Turn Page*]

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stock of bread being nearly exhausted, we were restricted to a purely animal diet and lived on the flesh of the deer, antelope, elk, bighorn, beaver and jack-rabbit.

Beavers along Little Sandy were quite numerous, and wherever there were trees near the banks we found traces of their work. We saw trees one foot through which had been cut down with their teeth.

We were crossing the highest mountains in the Wind River range, and the most of us enjoyed the immensity of that elevated region. We met no Indians after leaving the Sweetwater, but while traversing the territory of the Blackfeet (a jealous and warlike people) the nightwatch was doubled. Twelve men were assigned their stations at sunset and relieved at midnight by twelve others, who remained on their beats until sunrise the next morning. As we were never troubled with insomnia, this extra guard duty was a little trying. As an additional precaution, we placed a sentinel on a high point during our noon halts to give warning of the approach of Indians and watch for game. Volunteers were never lacking for that service, for when armed with the Doctor's field-glass (as was usually the case) they had opportunities which few could hope to enjoy.

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Our men at this time, notwithstanding the animal diet, were all enjoying excellent health, and, although we slept in the open air with no covering but our blankets to protect us from the frosty atmosphere, not a cold had been

[*Turn To Page* 96]

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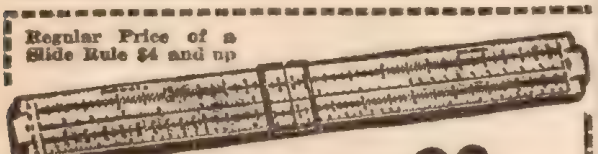

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contracted and no complaints were heard from any one.

On July 30th the advance guard was off early looking for a passage through the next range, for we seemed to be in a deep hole and surrounded by rugged mountains and conical peaks. We traveled up the Little Sandy in a northwest course for five or six miles, where we struck a tributary of the river, and up this stream, in a westerly course by a difficult and dangerous trail we toiled until about 2 p. m., when we were regarded by striking a fine mountain park in which to halt for dinner.

In the little valley of fifteen or twenty acres, nestling between mountain peaks, we found everything needed for our comfort. Even the deer, which

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STATEMENT REQUIRED BY THE ACT OF AUGUST 24, 1912, AS AMENDED BY THE ACTS OF MARCH 3, 1933, and JULY 2, 1946 (Title 39, United States Code, Section 233) SHOWING THE OWNERSHIP, MANAGEMENT, AND CIRCULATION OF

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1. The names and addresses of the publisher, editor, managing editor, and business managers are: Publisher, Louis H. Silberkleit, 241 Church St., New York, 13, N.Y.: Editor, Robert W Lowndes, 241 Church St., New York 13, N.Y.: Managing editor, Robert W Lowndes, 241 Church St., New York 13, N.Y.; Business manager, Maurice Coyne, 241 Church St., New York 13, N.Y.

2. The owner is: (If owned by a corporation, its name and address must be stated and also immediately thereunder the names and addresses of stockholders owning or holding 1 percent or more of total amount of stock. If not owned by a corporation, the names and addresses of the individual owners must be given. If owned by a partnership or other unincorporated firm, its name and address, as well as that of each individual member, must be given.) Columbia Publications, Inc., 241 Church St., New York 13, N.Y.; Louis H. Silberkleit, 241 Church St., New York 13, N.Y.; Maurice Coyne, 241 Church St., New York 13, N.Y.; Michael I. Silberkleit, 241 Church St., New York 13, N.Y.

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5. The average number of copies of each issue of this publication sold or distributed, through the mails or otherwise, to paid subscribers during the 12 months preceding the date shown above was: (This information is required from daily, weekly, semiweekly, and triweekly newspapers only.)

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furnished the meat for our dinner, was captured on the spot by the hunters who were in advance of our train. The valley was pronounced the most picturesque mountain park yet seen, and many of our party would have liked to camp there for a day. There was no timber within view except small evergreens and thickets of service-berry bushes.

The brooklet along which we rested was coursing through a modest little canyon, twenty feet deep in some places, and at one point not more than four or five feet across the top. A small field of snow on the north side of a mountain peak furnished water for a beautiful little cascade, which was leaping from a shelf of solid rock, with a perpendicular fall of twenty-five or thirty feet, which, with its crystal waters shimmering in the sunlight, formed a scene of rare beauty.

About two hours were spent in that mountain retreat, which proved to be a fine field for students in geology, while in these little valleys, with rare plants in brilliant bloom, the botanist loves to linger.

While at our halt, two bears were sighted by the lookout among the berry bushes, in a gorge not far from camp. Twenty armed men, with their dinners half eaten, followed them for more than an hour, but the bears got away without a scratch; not so the men, for they returned with rent clothing and many small wounds, resulting from forcing their way through the brush.

We worked our way down the west side of the ridge, and some time after dark formed a camp on the west side of the Big Sandy River, where, being well supplied with grass, fuel and venison, the fatigues of the day were forgotten in refreshing sleep, of which he who has never led a pair of stubborn mules across the Rocky Mountains, with wild game as his only food, knows nothing.

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